

HINDUISM TODAY

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Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance

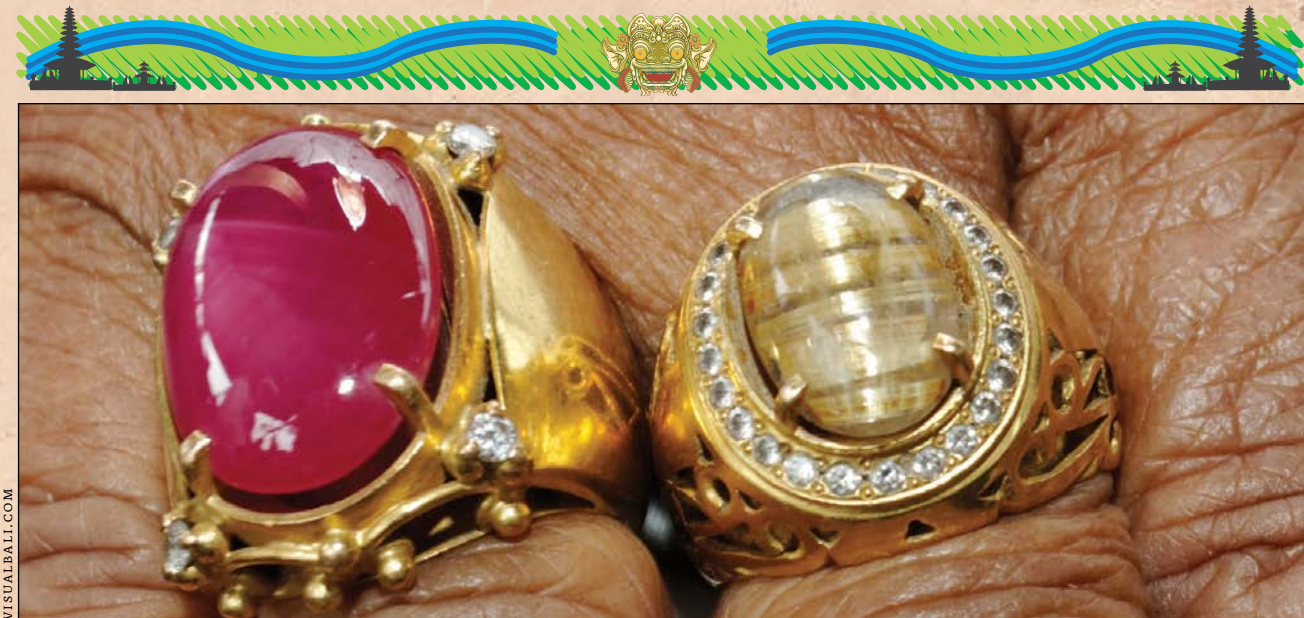


SPECIAL ISSUE

BALI



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COVER: A Balinese woman performs a welcome dance during the full-moon ceremony in Bedulu village, January 15, 2010; (inset) Balinese aum; (above) extraordinary rings grace the hands of many Balinese, including these of a Basaik temple priest

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2012 • HINDU YEAR 5114
NANDANA, THE YEAR OF HAPPINESS

Bodhinatha Veylanswami www.gurudeva.org

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Best Hindu
Magazine

Painted Hands

Her hands elaborately decorated with mehendi patterns (right), a bride awaits the marriage ceremony. Mehendi signifies the strength of love in a marriage, and the longer it lasts the more auspicious. During the mehendi ceremony, a day or two prior to the wedding, the bride's mother, sisters, cousins and female friends join in merriment. They dance, celebrate and artistically apply natural dyes from the henna plant on the bride's hands and feet. Often the groom attends and may have his hands painted as well. (below) Bride and groom walk hand in hand after their wedding. Page 36





GLOBAL DHARMA



Hindu students honor their teachers at Sedgwick Elementary School, Cupertino, California, June, 2011. See: <http://www.hssus.org/>

U S A

Guru Vandana in California

SINCE 2005 THE HINDU SWAYAM SEVAK SANGH IN CALIFORNIA has held an annual Guru Vandana, or Teacher's Appreciation day. In June, 2011, 15 teachers participated and were delighted, with tears in their eyes, to have their feet touched and tilak applied by Hindu teens and young children. The kids were thrilled to express appreciation to those who have worked so hard to help them learn. <http://bit.ly/guruvandana>



The new Vishwa Niketan school in the village of Subidhat, Bangladesh, reflects a new era of Hindu missionary efforts

B A N G L A D E S H

US Hindu Mission

I N DECEMBER 2011 VISHWA Niketan, a school for poor children, opened in Bangladesh, funded by a US non-profit, International Gita Society (IGS). IGS was founded in 1984 by Dr. Ramananda Prasad, retired US Navy official and professor

at San Jose State University. To date the IGS has distributed over 100,000 copies of the *Bhagavad Gita* worldwide. It is one of several new initiatives by Hindus in the United States to strengthen Hindu communities in the lands of their roots.



Jay Hegde as Yaksha Gana, delivering all his lines in Sanskrit

A U S T R A L I A

Sanskrit Is Well Down Under

S TUDENTS OF AUSTRALIA'S SYDNEY SANSKRIT SCHOOL ARE NOT just studying Sanskrit, they are conversing in the language. Five years after being founded, the school is growing in numbers. Its annual Samskrutotsavam, literally "Sanskrit festival," held in November 2011 at the Dundas Community Centre, was a huge success. All the performances and many keynote speeches were voiced in Sanskrit. Shri Cha Mu Krishna Shastry, the founder of Sam-skrita Bharati, an organization advocating the revival of spoken Sanskrit, was invited as the guest of honor from India. See <http://samskritabharati.in/> and <http://www.samskritabharatiusa.org/> for information on this growing movement. The mission targets this vision: "Revival of Sanskrit as a mass communication language and facilitation of common man's access to its vast knowledge treasure. To attain social harmony and national integration by taking Sanskrit to the masses, regardless of caste and creed." Hindus in Australia are taking giant steps toward fulfill these goals.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HINDU SWAYAM SEVAK SANGH, USA; SYDNEY SANSKRIT SCHOOL; INTERNATIONAL GITA SOCIETY



I N D I A

Honoring Swami Vivekananda

I N D I A DECLARED SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S birthday a National Youth Day in 1984. This year was his 150th birth anniversary. On January 12, 2012, the Swarna Bhoomi Gurukulam School in the

Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu staged a special tribute to honor the Hindu leader and his noble values as a source of inspiration. Dressed as Swami Vivekananda, 370 students from kindergarten

to standard 10 stood in his "most famous and attractive posture" for fifteen minutes. The student body received two world records for their feat, one for the most people dressed up like Swami Vivekananda and a second for the most people to stand in the same posture for 15 minutes without moving.

World Records: Mr. Rohit Arora (right) from New Delhi was on hand. As the adjudicator of India Book of Records and Asia Book of Records, he awarded the school two world records.

P A K I S T A N

Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan

I N NOVEMBER 2011 THE US Commission on International Religious Freedom released an unusual study, "Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan," as part of its work to monitor the rise of religious extremism in that country. The study was conducted by the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy (ICRD) in Washington, DC, in partnership with Pakistan's own Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad.

According to the study, despite Pakistan's constitutional mandate to protect members of all faiths, its education system was infused with rigid Islamic content by General Zia-Ul Haq. In 1979, he set policy to "reorganize curriculum content around Islamic thought so that Islamic ideology permeates the thinking of the younger generation and helps them with the necessary conviction and ability to refashion society according to Islamic tenets." In 2006, the government of Pakistan took steps toward reform, including efforts to

reverse educational Islamization. But there has been little progress. Incidents of violence against minorities—Hindus, Christians and Ahmadi Muslims (a peaceful, modern reformist sect of Islam)—continue on a regular basis. The study constituted an effort to better understand the situation and help define remedies.

ICRD and SDPI reviewed more than 100 textbooks from grades 1 to 10 from all of Pakistan's four provinces. In addition they interviewed 277 students and teachers from 37 public middle and high schools and 226 students and teachers from 19 madrassas (religious schools).

The report states, "The results are eye-opening and concerning. Hindus were described in especially negative terms, and references to Christians were often inaccurate and offensive. A majority of students viewed non-Muslims as the enemies of Islam. This is particularly troubling in light of the fact that nearly all students considered jihad (the violent form) to be obligatory." Search "Connecting the Dots" at www.uscirf.gov.

Hindus as Depicted in Textbooks

EXCERPTS FROM A STUDY CONDUCTED BY ICRD

"Overall, Hindus are portrayed as enemies of Pakistan and Muslims in Urdu and Social and Pakistan Studies textbooks. Social and Pakistan Studies textbooks express hatred towards India and Great Britain, but Hindus are often singled out as particularly inferior or evil.

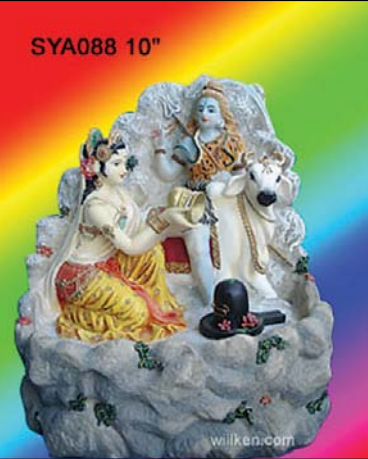
"Hindus are repeatedly described as extremists and eternal enemies of Islam whose culture and society is based on injustice and cruelty, while Islam delivers a message of peace and brotherhood, concepts portrayed as alien to the Hindu. Thus, negative depictions of Hindus are manifested through both historical distortions and the framing of concepts through religious language that promotes the superiority of Islam over Hinduism, as in the following examples from textbooks:

"Before the Arab conquest the people were fed up with the teachings of Buddhists and Hindus.

"Islam's social equality and justice to all freed the caste ridden Hindu society and paved the way for spread of Islam. We know that low caste Hindus suffered due to the caste system. Hindus belonging to lower castes were tortured, insulted and disgraced.

"Hindu leadership has not only shown their religious hatred but also expressed their political hatred by opposing to celebrate their independence day on the same day.

"Hindus have tried all their means to harm Muslims of Indian sub-continent and killed millions of Muslims. They were deprived of their assets and properties."



INDIA / CHINA

Hindu Murtis from China

CHINA'S LEGENDARY POWER of securing market share by manufacturing replicas of products originally designed and produced in other countries have recently turned to India. China Willken Arts and Crafts Ltd. in Xiamen has mastered the craft of inexpensive

polyresin religious statues. A couple of years ago they introduced Ganesha and Buddha for auto dashboards. They sold well. Realizing the potential, the company extended the offering to include larger statues meant for puja rooms. Today their Hindu God Statues line

Quality polyresin statues: (right to left) baby Krishna, Saraswati, Siva Nataraja, and a scene with Siva and Parvati

has more than 500 images.

The manufacturer has done their homework. Even statues of saints like Baba Lokenath, Shirdi Sai Baba and Ramakrishna Paramahansa have gone into production and sale. A minimum order is 500 pieces. During India's festival season they arrive

in container loads at Kolkata.

Indian distributors say they are hand finished by Chinese households, inexpensive, can be sold for low prices and don't threaten local craftsmen because Indians don't make this type of statue. See: www.alibaba.com/member/dongqiujiing.html

VIETNAM

UNESCO Protects My Son

IN 1999 UNESCO DESIGNATED the My Son sanctuary in Vietnam a World Heritage site. This is good news for Hindus, who can now rest assured that this treasure will be preserved. The site represents an ancient settlement and sanctuary area; eight groups of tower temples have been singled out. All are constructed in fired brick with stone pillars.

The Hindu architecture of Cambodia and Indonesia are well known, but not many know that a Hindu kingdom also reigned

along the Vietnamese coast from the 4th to the 13th centuries. My Son, a small valley flanked by mountains, was the capital and religious center of the Champa Kingdom, which originated in 192 CE and was deeply influenced by the *Saiva Agama* tradition. Between the sixth and tenth centuries, fine temples were built for Krishna and Vishnu, but above all for Siva. Champa was eventually absorbed by the growing power of Vietnam to the North. Read more at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/949>.

and maulvis have pledged their support in this campaign to save female children.

TEMPLE ELEPHANTS

in Tamil Nadu were given a 48-day vacation in December, 2011. Trucks fetched elephants from various temples and *maths* and took 45 weary pachyderms to a rejuvenation camp

in the Mudumalai coastal forests for rest and a nourishing diet that included herbal medications and vitamins.

Global Dharma news provided by
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PHOTOS: CHINA WILLKEN ARTS AND CRAFTS LTD; UNESCO



IN MY OPINION

The Light of the Spirit

An ancient story leads us to five laws that, if we heed them, will lead us to the goal of life

BY DADA J. P. VASWANI

A BEAUTIFUL STORY is given to us in our ancient legends. A great rishi, Yajnavalkya, comes to the palace of Raja Janaka, one of the greatest kings this land has known. Raja Janaka sat on a throne, but his heart was the heart of a saint, a holy man of God.

After the sage is received with due respect by the king, he begins, "Tell me, O King, what is the light whereby a man lives and moves and works and walks and finally to his home returns?" Raja Janaka replies readily, "O Gurudeva, the light by which all men live and move, the light by which they work and walk and then to their homes return is the light of the sun!"

The rishi smiles. "When the sun has set, what is the light whereby men live and move and work and walk and then to their homes return?" The king replies, "When the sun has set, men must live and move, work and walk and then to their homes return by the light of the moon."

"And what if the sun and the moon have both disappeared?" queries the rishi. "Then, men must live and move and work and walk by the light of the fire," says the king.

"When the light of the sun, the moon and the fire have all gone out," continues the rishi, "what is the light by which men can live and move and work and walk and to their homes return?" The king is puzzled. He has no ready answer and begs the rishi to enlighten him.

Rishi Yajnavalkya gives Raja Janaka the teaching I believe is the message of the Hindu faith to modern civilization: "When all external light has gone out—when the sun does not shine, when the moon does not radiate and the fire is put out—there is still one light that shines. It is the light of the atman, the light of the Spirit. It is by this, the light of all lights, that the sun shines, the moon is radiant and the fire is aglow. It is this light by which man must live and work and walk and to his eternal home return."

The light of the atman, the Self, the Spirit:



it was around this that our glorious culture was built in ancient India. This culture was known as *atma vidya*, the science of the spirit. For spirituality too, is a science; it concerns the discovery of the one Self in all. Spirituality makes us raise the fundamental question: What is man? Or, to put it more personally, what am I? It is this self-knowledge that the

Hindu faith leads us to seek.

There are five laws of *atma vidya*, which every individual and every nation must obey if we are to reach the goal of life. The first is what I would describe as the law of the seed: as you sow, so you shall reap. The second is the law of the wheel. This law of reincarnation emphasizes a cardinal Hindu doctrine: the body dies, but the soul does not die. The law of the seed and the law of the wheel are intertwined. We must face the consequences of our actions, and our karma will be carried forward from birth to birth until we become wise enough to end all karma.

When we accept the second law, the question arises: how long shall we keep whirling on this wheel of birth and death? How may we seek liberation from this wheel? Therefore, we come upon the third law, of *nidhyasana*, assimilation: you must assimilate the teachings you have been given into your daily life.

The fourth is the law of reverence, *shrad-dha*. The essence of the *Vedas*, what we call Vedanta, teaches us that there is but One Life in all!

Fifth is the law of *yajna*, sacrifice. Krishna says to his dear, devoted disciple Arjuna: "Whatever you do, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you practice, do it as an offering unto me!" This is true *yajna*: to make your entire life an offering to the Lord. Sacrifice your ego-self, sacrifice your desire, and do whatever you do for the love of God.

DADA J.P. VASWANI is the spiritual head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune, India.

BRIEFLY...

MADRASSA BAITUL ISLAM, A Deobandi Muslim seminary in Matli, Pakistan, is buying Hindu conversions. They keep meticulous logs, and, as of December 22, 2011, they had converted their 428th Hindu to Islam. A conversion can cost from a few thousand to fifty thousand rupees. A newly converted family receives Rs 5,000, a copy of the

Koran, free housing for several months, ready access to medical care, national ID cards and land.

HINDU AND MUSLIM PRIESTS in India are starting a campaign to add a new marriage vow to the ceremony: a promise never to indulge in the illegal practice of pre-natal sex determination. Over 308 pandits

Behold the Sacred Lotus Flower

Progressing from our instinctive to intellectual to spiritual nature, our soul unfolds to resplendence like a beautiful lotus

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

THE HINDU VIEWPOINT IS THAT THE SEED OF Divinity is within everyone. My guru's guru, Siva Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, had a down-to-earth way of expressing this idea. "See everyone as God. Don't say, 'This man is a robber. That one is a womanizer. The man over there a drunkard.' This man is God. That man is God. God is within everyone. The seed is there. See that and ignore the rest." It is definitely reassuring that there is no one who isn't a divine being—that no one ends up in an eternal hell. Rather, it's just a question of when an individual's divine essence will express itself. It may be a few more lives before it does. After all, spiritual unfoldment is a slow and inexorable process.

My own guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, chose an insightful analogy for the process of spiritual unfoldment, which in Sanskrit is called *adhyatma vikasa*. He spoke about the lotus, how its seed starts in the pond's dark mud. Its roots give rise to a stem that reaches up through the water into the air. From the stem evolves a bud, tiny at first, which grows into a flower that slowly opens its exquisite petals to the sun, the central nectar and pollen calling to the bees. Gurudeva compares that process to man's nature and spiritual unfoldment. The mud is the instinctive mind. We all start out in the mud in one lifetime or another. In our early evolution we are crude and unkind. We tend to hurt other people and think more of ourself than others. Maybe we even end up in jail. We all start down there, in the roots, immersed in the darkness of the instinctive mind, crashing around like a bull in a china shop.

Life follows life as we live and learn. Finally we get some control over our instincts and move up into the water, which is the intellectual mind. We become a thinking person, someone who is able to make decisions logically, someone who has basic control over the instinctive emotions so that when threatened he or she doesn't automatically become angry and fight.

At this point we are an instinctive-intellectual person, living partly in the mud of our animal nature, partly in the water of our intelligence. Such a person has no sense of God and the sacredness of life. The world is full of people like that, the atheists, materialists and existentialists. They are oblivious to the spiritual purpose of life, a purpose that goes beyond this incarnation.

Then what happens? The stem rises above the water's surface. It rises out of the water into the air, which represents intuition, our spirituality or some sense of the existence of God. We start to think about religion; we start to think about spiritual practices. Just being an instinctive and an intellectual person, just pursuing ordinary things, worldly pursuits, no longer satisfies us. But the bud is closed, yet to mature and open. The closed bud knows God is out there but



has had no direct experience of Him.

What causes the bud to open? Learning and maturing life after life, grace of enlightened beings, blessings of the Deity and spiritual practice. To open the bud, we have to consciously strive.

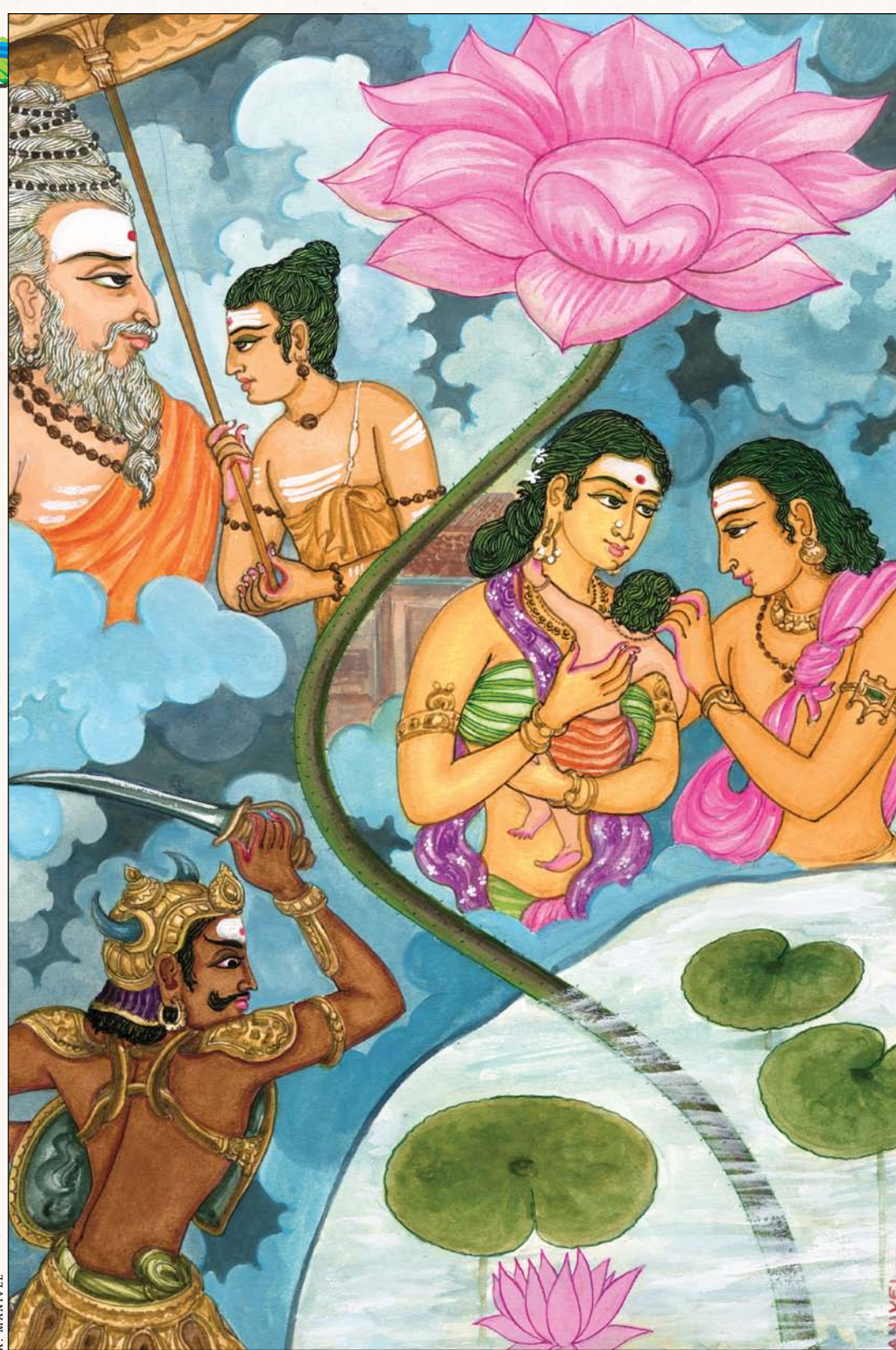
Hinduism gives us religious practices that can be grouped into four categories. The first is simply good conduct, character building, charya. It is the foundation for deeper practices. Second is selfless service, seva or karma yoga—doing things for other people we don't have to do. That's how I define it. If in our place of work we do something for someone else out of the goodness of our heart, that counts as seva. Seva doesn't have to be done at a temple or an ashram. If we

go to work and only do what we're paid for, no seva is taking place.

The third category of practice is devotion, bhakti, which we express at a temple as well as at the temple we have in our own home. Maintaining a home shrine and worshipping there daily is an essential practice. The fourth is meditation, dhyana. Meditation is a bit advanced and requires a teacher's help to do well at it. Most people I speak with say, "I try and meditate but I can't control my thoughts." They don't have a teacher. They haven't had someone personally explain the art of meditation to them. It's an unusual person who can learn meditation by himself.

Thus, the four categories of practice are good conduct, service, devotion and meditation. What happens when you take up some of these practices and perform them on a regular basis? The bud slowly opens. Your Divinity, which waited silently in the seed, blossoms.

Many Western ideas and goals are based on the underlying attitude that there is only one life—or there may be only one life—so we had better do everything we can in this life. We had better achieve God Realization in this life, just in case. The Hindu attitude, based on the confidence that we live many lives, is: "I know I'm coming back; no rush. I will do as much as I can in this lifetime, and there will be ample time for further advancement." The Hindu approach is to make spiritual progress in every lifetime—open the bud a little bit more. We are content to move forward by consistent practice, with whatever intensity we can sustain, without rushing, without fear of falling short. We rest assured that the seed of Divinity resides within each of us.



Spiritual evolution: The lotus, symbol of spiritual growth, rises out of the mud, up through the water and into full bloom. Our passage through many lives is similar. We begin with base, instinctive traits, such as violence, evolve to dharmic family living, and finally blossom as an awakened spiritual being.

this divine presence: "God is so close to us. He is closer than our breathing, nearer to us than our hands or feet. Yes, He is the very essence of our soul."

Back to our analogy of the lotus flower. When the lotus flower is sufficiently open, we begin living consciously in our spiritual or intuitive nature. Let's ask the question, "What is it that makes spiritual progress? What is it that unfolds?" It is the soul. In thinking about spiritual unfoldment, it is helpful to understand the nature of the soul. We distinguish between the soul body and its essence. The essence is two-fold: unchanging pure consciousness and transcendent Absolute Reality, beyond time, form and space. The soul body is a human-like, self-effulgent being of light which evolves and matures. This immortal soul body is referred to in Sanskrit as *anan-damaya kosha* (sheath of bliss). It is the soul body that, like the lotus flower, unfolds. The soul's essence is eternally perfect, identical with God.

Just as our physical body matures from an infant to an adult, so too does this self-effulgent body of light mature in resplendence and intelligence, evolving from life to life, gradually strengthening its inner nerve system, progressing from ignorance of God to God realization.

Gurudeva shared his own mystical experience of the soul body in *Merging with Siva*: "One day you will see the being of you, your divine soul body. You will see it inside the physical body. It looks like clean, clear plastic. Around it is a blue light, and the outline of it is whitish yellow. Inside of it is blue-yellowish light, and there are trillions of little nerve currents, or quanta, and light scintillating all through that. This body stands on a lotus flower. Inwardly looking down through your feet, you see you are standing on a big, beautiful lotus flower. This body has a head, it has eyes, and it has infinite intelligence. It is tuned into and feeds from the source of all energy."

There is another aspect to spiritual unfoldment. Choose the one Hindu saint, swami or yogi, living or passed on, who you feel achieved the greatest spiritual attainment. Now imagine and accept the idea that his or her attainment is your own potential. That is the surprising truth. The potential to achieve what anyone else has achieved spiritually lies within you to be manifested at some point in your future. Perhaps that thought will motivate you to put just a bit more effort into those spiritual practices! Visualize the lotus flower

in full, magnificent bloom—that is the symbol of your full, resplendent spiritual potential.

Of course, that potential only becomes practical when you strive. If you are serious in your seeking, ask yourself a series of questions: How am I applying the four kinds of practice in my life now? Good conduct? Seva? Bhakti? Meditation and yoga? Which areas are most in need of my attention and increased effort? What do I need to do in order to improve? Then do it.

Hinduism takes that idea one step further: eventually each of us will have the realization of God, our indwelling Self. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* states, "He who with the truth of atman, the soul, unified, perceives the truth of Brahman as with a lamp, who knows God, the unborn, the stable, free from all forms of being, is released from all fetters." This is quite different from the concept, prevalent in Western faiths, that God is in heaven and cannot be experienced by those living on Earth. Gurudeva often spoke of the immediacy of



LETTERS

Rishikesh's Kailash Ashram

I have been a regular reader of HINDUISM TODAY for years. The group behind the magazine works hard and does an excellent job. I appreciate you all for your sincere approach, keeping the spirit high in your effort to educate a new generation of Hindus. I suggest doing a feature on Kailash Ashram in Rishikesh. Considered to hold the last word on Vedanta studies, the ashram claims among its students many masters, including Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ram Theerth, Swami Thapovan, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi and more. Such an article would help all Hindus and others seeking to study Vedanta.

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Rejoice in Deities' Diversity

Hats off to Ramdas Lamb for his article "Rejoice in Deities Diversity" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012). This is one of the most common questions, or shall I say misconceptions, that I come across in my many college and interfaith lectures. So, it was refreshing to read this simple, clear explanation about how monotheism (one single all-powerful Divinity) and polytheism (multiple Divinities) coexist and are uniquely merged in Hinduism. The analogy to the functioning of a democratic society was a master stroke. I thank you for publishing this educational article and your continued service to Hindus in all corners of the world.

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Thanks for *What Is Hinduism?*

Many blessings to you for spreading good values and virtues through the wonderful book *What Is Hinduism?* I was so engrossed in it that I completely forgot about my physics masters exam after two days! I will definitely gift this book to my non-Hindu friends. I would also like to know if this book is available in PDF.

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✓ The book is available for free in PDF at www.hinduismtoday.com/wih.

Cleanliness of Temples

As a practicing Hindu, I have had the good fortune to visit many temples in India. My concern is the lack of hygiene in most of them; used incense packs, leaves and flowers are just piled in a corner, and prasadam dirties the floors. True, most of these structures are ancient, but shouldn't priests and

devotees be concerned about proper upkeep? How can we educate and encourage temple authorities and devotees to keep the temples clean? I would gladly be a part of any such initiative across the country.

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Chidambaram Temple

The Natarajar Temple in Chidambaram is a temple of great historical importance. It has antiquity, mythological significance and has been a source of inspiration behind volumes of literary works by Saiva saints. Thus, it qualifies to be declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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Gay Hindus in Hiding

Although I am a married heterosexual, I attend my local LGBT community's pride festival every year—not only in a kurta and dhoti, but with tilaka as well. I do this for the young Indian people who are forced to conceal their true selves from their parents. I have had young Indian Hindus tell me that they know at some point they will have to come out to their parents because they have no intention of going through with an arranged marriage. We all know just how much family is a part of Indian culture. I explain to them that they should not go through with an arranged marriage if they do not wish to and that, furthermore, in my opinion, Hindu parents should not try to force their child to do so against his or her will. Each of our souls is a part of God, and it is high time that we learn the difference between culture and religion, as sometimes one's cultural beliefs actually go against the very teachings of the path one claims to follow. Homosexuality is a topic that should be openly discussed in these modern times.

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Animal Sacrifice in the Vedas

In response to Kishen Raval's letter (Oct/Nov/Dec 2011), I had the opportunity to hear first hand a detailed explanation of the "Purusha Sukta" that put my similar question to rest. Hinduism is full of symbolism, and the significance of these rituals is often lost in translation when they are passed down through the generations. The idea was to sacrifice, or give up, one's animalistic tendencies on the path to spiritual enlightenment. In fact, the sacrificial animal (usually a goat) usually only had water sprinkled on it to

symbolize the sacrifice, after which it was set free. The Vedas did not actually prescribe the literal killing of animals as a part of yajnas; it was meant to have metaphorical significance.

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✓ An article on this subject in the context of Bali appears on p. 62–63 of this edition.

Eggs in Flu Vaccines

Last year my employer sponsored a flu vaccination for all employees. During the vaccination process I learned from the nurse that the viruses in the vaccine are grown in eggs and the vaccine may contain some egg proteins. I was confused for a moment whether to take it or not, but went ahead. My dilemma was whether or not we should consider this a regrettable exception to ahimsa. Obviously the flu vaccine was not something lifesaving or critical for my health, but may be protect me from the flu for a season.

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Pro-Brahmin Attitude

I am a regular reader of your magazine and appreciate the efforts you are taking to protect and propagate the Hindu faith in the western world. But I am sorely disappointed that your magazine, otherwise a pleasure to read, comes across as pro-Brahmin, to the detriment of other castes. The arrogance of Brahmins and their vanity led them to suppose that the Hindu religion was synonymous with them and would not exist but for them. However (thankfully), those beliefs crumbled long ago and good sense now prevails. In this enlightened atmosphere, your attitude in equating Hinduism with Brahmin culture is a step backward.

You have been vehemently opposed to the takeover of the Chidambaram temple by the Tamil Nadu government. Your primary reason, evident in your articles, is that the hereditary Brahmin priests who have been lording over it for so long will be displaced by the much-needed takeover. Why don't you at least mention the fact that they refused Saint Nandanar entry into the temple because he was an Untouchable and later burnt him alive when he entered the temple without their permission?

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✓ On the story of Saint Nandanar, Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar responds, "To say that the Chidambaram Dikshitar re-



fused Nandanar entry into the temple and burnt him is not only baseless but also highly venomous. The author of Periya Puranam gives a clear and true picture of Nandanar: Lord Nataraja appears in the dream of the Dikshitar, ordering them to arrange a fire ritual for the sake of Nandanar (who is an outcast by birth) and to invite him with due honors inside the temple. The Dikshitar do so, and Nandanar gets into the fire pit, then assuming a luminous form looking like another Brahma. With his newly acquired divine body, Nandanar walks into the main shrine and merges with Lord Nataraja."

Duplicious Catholic Greetings

I have been concerned for a while with the occasional disparaging comments on Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular. The most recent appeared in "Vatican Sends Diwali Greetings to Hindus," (Hindu Press International, Oct. 29, 2011). Your characterization of this as "unfortunately, representative of the Catholic Holy See's attitude toward other religions" is another negative example. Frankly, I found this and the commentary that followed offensive, especially since it misrepresents the actual statement that can be viewed in its entirety at bit.ly/vatican-diwali. I might also add that at bit.ly/assisi-oct11 you can see the efforts that the Vatican has made as far as other religions in the Assisi gathering that took place recently. While it may not be exactly as everyone wanted it to be, it is an enormous step in the direction

of interfaith/intercultural dialog and mutual respect between religious leaders of good will, including representatives of the Hindu tradition. It might be to everyone's advantage if you demonstrated similar effort to reach out as opposed to adding to the unfortunate divisiveness that exists!

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✓ Thank you for your letter of concern over our reposting of an article from the Independent Catholic News. The 2003 Message of the Pontifical Council on Diwali by Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald and the 2011 message by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran continue in a line of aggressive and antagonistic statements by the Catholic Church on the occasion of Diwali, the largest and most universal of all Hindu festivals. These date back at least to the statement of John Paul II on Diwali itself, November 7, 1999, in New Delhi: "Just as the first millennium saw the Cross firmly planted in the soil of Europe, and the second in that of America and Africa, so may the Third Christian Millennium witness a great harvest of faith on this vast and vital continent." This paragraph is prefaced, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). We assume Hinduism is the "darkness" in which the "light" of Christianity is shining, and that it is Hindus who are to be "harvested" like so many stalks of grain ripe for the taking.

The Courage to Say Who You Are

How to help the world by making Hinduism strong

“HINDUISM TODAY DARES TO USE THE dreaded H-word,” chuckles Dr. Krishan Chawla, professor of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. “I am pained to hear our leaders say ‘no, I am not a Hindu,’ or ‘yoga is not Hindu,’ or hide behind the word Vedic. I find it distasteful to dissimulate who you are. And selling wares without acknowledging the source is very simply plagiarism, a form of theft.”

“This is quite serious,” he continues, “because in weakening Hinduism, the whole world is deprived. The world is hungry for Hinduism’s truths and, more and more, is counting on them for its salvation. To interfere in that process, really, there are no words...”

Dr. Chawla has given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment.

“When my copy of the magazine arrives, I drop everything and imbibe the beautiful spirit of it, the overwhelming sincerity and courage to forthrightly declare Hinduism’s greatness while maintaining simplicity, elegance and infinite tolerance. And no beating of drums. This is soothing to me. It is a constant source of inspiration. I share my copy with my family and give subscriptions to my friends.”

If, like Dr. Chawla, you value our magazine’s firm stand on behalf of Hinduism and share his vision for Sanatana Dharma’s role in the world today and tomorrow, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund at:

www.hheonline.org/donate/pf. Read more about it at www.hheonline.org/productionfund. Subscribe to the Production Fund e-newsletter at: www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Or chat with us: 1-808-634-5407, hhe@hindu.org.

The 2003 statement reads, “Neither the Hindu dharma nor the Christian faith teaches hate, contempt or disrespect for others.” However, as you must be aware, the 2011 Assisi gathering (to which you refer), for the first time in the gathering’s history, did not include a common prayer, because of the Catholic position that such common prayer might imply other faiths’ equality with the Catholic faith. From the Hindu point of view, an unwillingness to pray together for such reasons is a show of disrespect and brings into question the Vatican’s willingness to make toward peace with other religions. But the 2011 event is cited in Cardinal Tauran’s statement as “promoting religious freedom.”

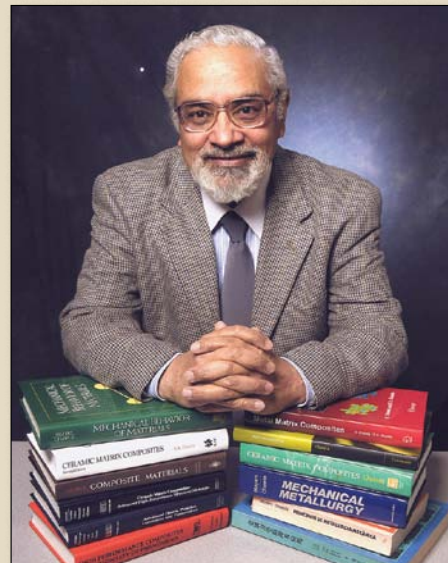
We are sorry you were offended by our editorial comments, but we cannot let such statements pass without informing Hindus of the duplicity involved.

Correction

✓ In “Meet the US Army’s First Hindu Chaplain” (Jan/Feb/Mar 2012), Captain Pratima Dharm’s age was incorrectly stated as 45. She is 41.

Letters with writer’s name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:
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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.



“I am pleased to be a part of Hinduism Today. I know my humble donations will help it reach more souls hungry for knowledge.” Dr. Chawla with a collection of works he has published.

QUOTES & QUIPS

Whoever knows It as 'I am Brahman' becomes the universe.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.10)

Truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the *kali yuga*. If a man clings tenaciously to Truth, he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for Truth, one gradually loses everything. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

Himself will create, Himself will protect, Himself will annihilate, Himself will obscure. Having done these, He will bestow liberation, pervading and ruling all. **Tirumular**, *Saiva rishi*, author of the *Tirumantiram*

No one outside us can harm us. It is only we who have the power to harm ourselves by our choices. **Dada Vaswani**, leader of *Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. **Swami Vivekananda**, (1863–1902) founder *Ramakrishna Mission*

The mind cannot know what is beyond itself; but the mind is known by what is beyond, that essence of timelessness and spacelessness which makes everything perceivable, yet itself is beyond perception. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *Hindu sage*

I shall not make my body a tomb for other animals. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519), *Italian polymath, renaissance luminary, a vegetarian*

A mountain is composed of tiny grains of earth. The ocean is made up of tiny drops of water. Even so, life is but an endless series of little details, actions, speeches and thoughts, the consequences of even the least of them is far-reaching. **Swami Sivananda**, (1887–1963) founder of the *Divine Life Society*

The outer worship is approaching God properly, presenting ourselves acceptably. It is to offer our love, our adoration and then to speak out our prayer, our petition. The inner worship is to enjoy God's presence and not rush away, to stay, to sit, to meditate awhile and bask in the shakti, endeavoring to realize the Self within. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

A Plant-Based Diet

PERHAPS THEY WANT TO REDUCE THEIR RISK OF HEART DISEASE, cancer and a long list of malaises, or just feel better. Perhaps they have read the recent U.N. study which said eating less meat is better for the planet; or maybe all those yoga poses have led to awareness of an all-pervasive God and the sacred concept of ahimsa. More and more people are finding excellent, and numerous, reasons to start eating their vegetables.

The newly named "plant-based diet" emphasizes the eating of vegetables of all kinds, specially over refined grains, making for meals that are colorful, healthy and fresh. In the US, though the population is trending toward vegetarianism, many are not using

the v-word. It makes sense for purists—after all, if you are eating chickens once a week, you are not technically a vegetarian, and many Americans are choosing to take steps toward vegetarianism without fully committing to it. Hence, terms like *flexitarian*, for those who are vegetarians most of the time, or *pescatarian* for people who eat plants, dairy and fish. The vegetarian epithet is known to often evoke a negative reaction among meat eaters, making some new labels more acceptable alternatives. Actually, the English word *vegetarian* is a relatively modern, dating from the mid-1800s. Those who abstained from dead animals used to call their diet "Pythagorean," after the Greek philosopher who first advocated the practice in the Western world.

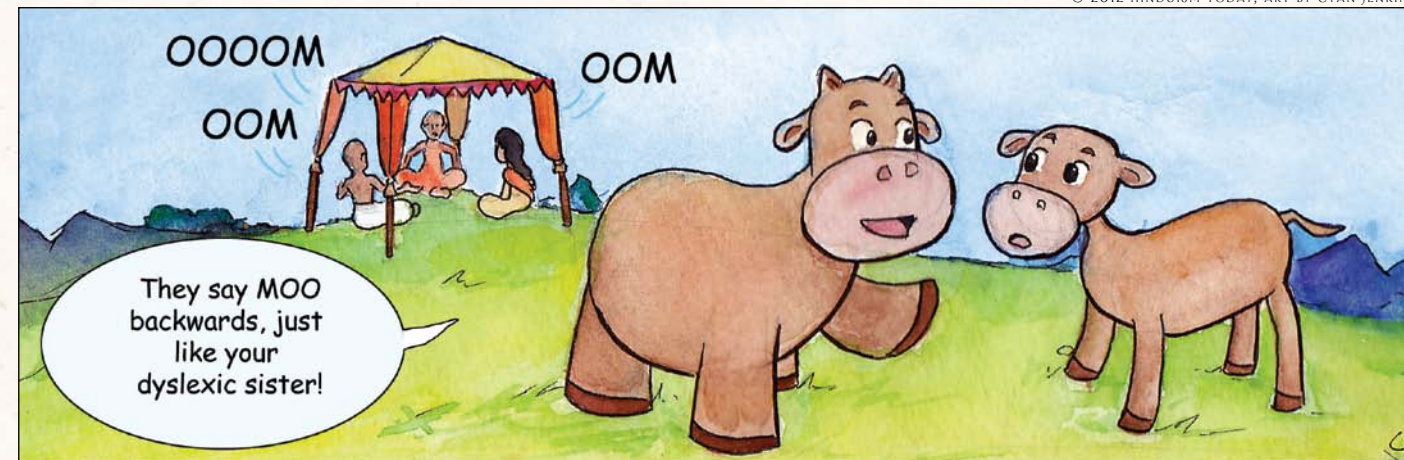
In some cases there is good reason for another name. When told by their doctors how much they could prolong their life expectancy by becoming vegetarians, patients—including open-heart surgery survivors—would stop eating animals and dramatically increase the intake of white flour, white rice and bad fat. That diet is a recipe for further ill health.

Famous chefs like Alice Waters have embraced flexitarianism. Meatless Mondays have caught on in influential, trendy circles. Mark Bittman, the *New York Times* celebrated food critic, wrote about how reducing your meat intake equates to swapping your gas-guzzling SUV for a Prius. The most influential and articulate advocate of this nutritional shift may be author Michael Pollan, whose motto is: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

America is in love with the idea. From there to delicious vegetable curries is just a small step.



DREAMTIME



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STEVE JOBS

A Genius Who Discovered His Intuition in India

WHEN DIFFERENT CULTURES MEET, A creative spark emerges, ready to be captured by those flexible enough to bring together the best of two worlds, geniuses like Steve Jobs, Apple's founder who passed away in 2011. Though Jobs was loosely affiliated with Zen Buddhism later in life, Hinduism and India were fundamental in forging his views of the world.

A nonconformist influenced by the romantic 1960s, wearing long hair, Jobs' dream was to visit India, inspired by his friend Robert Friedland who had just studied with Neem Karoli Baba. Arriving in Delhi in April 1974, he fell sick for days. After recovering Jobs headed to Haridwar, where a Kumbha Mela took him by surprise: "There were holy men all around, people riding elephants, you name it." But when Jobs arrived at Neem Karoli Baba's ashram, the guru had just passed away. Jobs stayed in a room, sleeping on the floor, where he found a forgotten copy of Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*—a book he would reread every year, the only one Jobs ever downloaded to his iPad 2.

Having missed the chance to see Neem Karoli Baba, Steve wandered. A peculiar incident, perhaps an initiation, marked his trip: "I was walking around in the Himalayas and I stumbled onto this religious festival. There was a baba who was the holy man of this particular festival, with his large group of followers. I could smell good food. I hadn't been fortunate

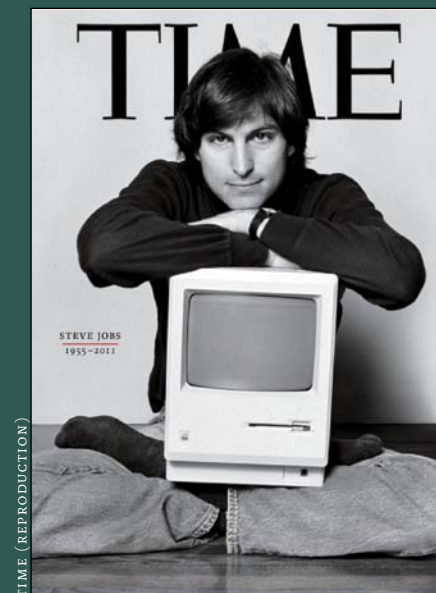
enough to smell good food for a long time, so I wandered up to pay my respects and eat some lunch. For some reason, this baba, upon seeing me sitting there eating, immediately walked over to me, sat down and burst out laughing. He didn't speak much English and I spoke a little Hindi, but he tried to carry on a conversation. Then he grabbed my arm and took me up this mountain trail. Here were hundreds of Indians who had traveled for thousands of miles to hang out with this guy for ten seconds and I stumble in for something to eat and he's dragging me up this mountain path. He laughed and laughed. We get to the top of this mountain and there's this little well and pond at the top of this mountain up in the Himalayas, and he dunks my head in the water and pulls out a razor from his pocket and starts to shave my head. I'm completely stunned. I'm still not sure why he did it."

Steve discovered intuition in India. "The most important thing that had struck me was that Western rational thought is not an innate human characteristic. The people in the Indian countryside don't use their intellect like we do, they use their intuition instead, and their intuition is far more developed than in the rest of the world. Intuition is a very powerful thing, more powerful than intellect, in my opinion. That's had a big impact on my work," Jobs later recalled to his biographer. "If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. But over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to

hear more subtle things—that's when your intuition starts to blossom," he said.

After returning from India, Jobs and his friend Steve Wozniak founded Apple computer in his parents' garage. From there on, he changed the world.

Steve had two pictures of Neem Karoli Baba in his room when he died, 35 years after his India trip. His sister Mona Simpson wrote of his last conscious moments: "Before embarking, Steve looked at his sister Patty, then for a long time at his children, then at his life's partner, Laurene, and then over their shoulders past them. Then he spoke his final words: 'OH WOW. OH WOW. OH WOW.'"



TIME (REPRODUCTION)

new! How Enlightened Men Live

The Guru Chronicles

THE MAKING OF THE FIRST AMERICAN SATGURU

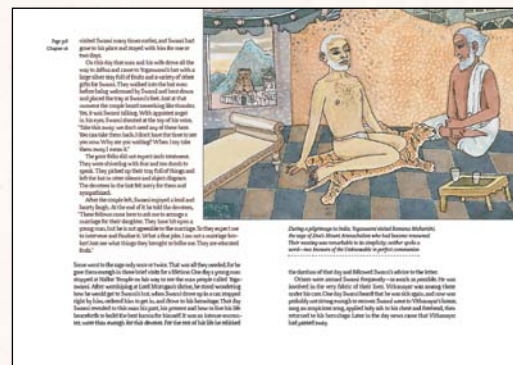
By the Swamis of Kauai's Hindu Monastery



The illustrated stories of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, his guru Siva Yogaswami and five preceding masters, who all held truth in the palm of their hand and inspired slumbering souls to "Know thy Self"



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"Just now I completed the reading of the most powerful *Guru Chronicles*. What a rewarding experience! The design, contents and presentation of the most powerful book to awaken, most wonderful to inspire and the most informative to instill constant devotion to the eternal Guru Parampara are indeed superb and praiseworthy." **DR. S.P. SABHARATHNAM, CHENNAI**

"Deeply captivating. The book has a musical magic, a beautifully lyrical story that happens at once in the past and the present, with the promise of an ever-deepening future of awakening for the reader. It brings so vibrantly to life the simple life and deep spiritual culture of India and Sri Lanka. S. Rajam's art adds to the musical quality, as his work is rhythmic and lyrical, too." **GAYATRI RAJAN, CALIFORNIA**

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FROM THE AGAMAS

How Grace Descends as the Guru

Siva bestows blessings when maya fades and karmas are balanced

The following text is a translation of verses 36 to 48 of Chapter Four of Paushkara Agama, "On the Nature of the Bound Soul." The topic is the readiness of the soul for initiation by the guru. In Saiva Siddhanta, there are three theological components: pati, pasu and pasa, literally, master, cow and tether; esoterically, God, soul and world. Pasa or mala ("impurity") limits or binds the soul and is of three kinds: anava, sense of ego; karma, results of action; and maya, relative reality. As a soul matures, it frees itself first from maya, then karma and finally anava.

WHEN ALL OF THE KARMAS OF THE SOUL, BOTH GOOD AND bad, become equal, then Sivasakti destroys them. Thereafter, no karma is left to yield its fruit. At this stage, the soul enjoys the state of *vijnanakevala* (freedom from karma and maya). (Some deem this to be liberation.)

Through such cessation of all karmas, there occurs the maturation of anava mala, with which karma operates as a cooperating bond. At this time, Sivashakti, the awakening and enlightening power whose nature is to bestow grace upon all souls, descends on the soul whose mala has matured and is ripe for removal.

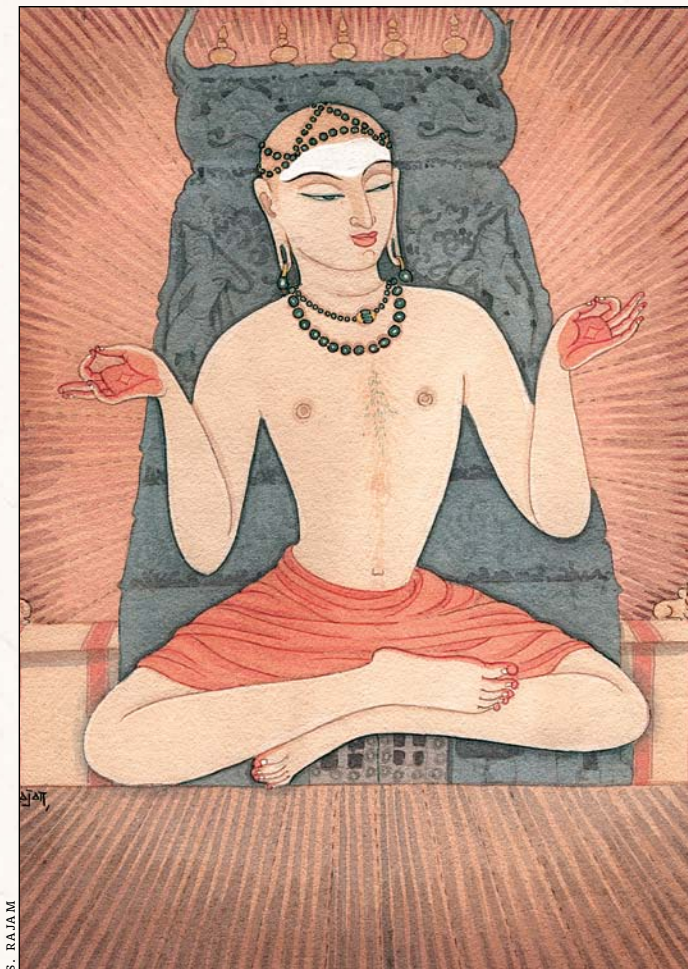
As soon as Shakti descends, the potency of mala, which keeps the soul in the lower planes of maya characterized by the repeated occurrence of birth and death, is removed. Then the person becomes indifferent to worldly existence. A sense of deep detachment dawns within him toward worldly pleasures and the transmigratory process that leads to the ocean of miseries. An intense desire to attain the lotus feet of Siva quickly unfolds, and he begins to insist, "When shall I see my Lord Siva? When shall I be relieved from the bondage? Which preceptor is there who could enable me see my Lord?"

Through His divine look, brimming with compassion, Lord Siva bestows His grace upon this mature soul that has become disenchanted with worldly existence. Considering the fitness of the soul, Siva bestows His grace instantly. Whichever soul it may be, whatever be its caste or other distinctions, Lord Siva purifies that soul through His immediate presence in the form of a guru.

The potency of anava mala, which veils the innate and essential nature of the soul, is set into a phase of decay by a specific form of grace that is actually Lord Siva's Shakti, called *shaktipata*. Siva causes a humility of spirit in the soul that has become fit enough to be favored, and a compassionate feeling in the mind of the preceptor. The resulting intimate communion between the blessed one and the blessing one is very rare and hard to come by.

The guru should discern that *shaktipata* has occurred within the disciple by watching for certain tendencies and behavioral attitudes the disciple will exhibit with uninterrupted zeal. Diksha (initiation) should only be performed for the disciple who has been purified by *shaktipata*. The *siva-dharmas* (characteristic proclivities of the mind deeply intent on the path of Siva) as instructed by the guru, as expounded in the *Agamas*, as explained in the other scriptures, such as the *Vedas*, and as expressed spontaneously by the disciple—all these are to be observed and analyzed well before giving diksha.

Bestowing diksha, which is basically my (Siva's) command, to a person who is bereft of devotional love, who is not purified with



Evolution: Each soul, while inherently perfect, must overcome the obscuring forces of ego, karma and maya over many lifetimes

samaya diksha (initiation to the mantra *Namasivaya*) and *vishesha diksha* (initiation to perform daily Siva worship), who is cruel and hard-hearted toward living beings, who is bereft of disaffection for worldly existence, who has abandoned austere virtues recommended for his stage, is tantamount to an act of killing. To this effect, there is also the command of the Shakti of the Supreme Ishvara. Diksha severs the constricting bonds from the soul and allows the powers of all-knowing and all-doing, which had remained concealed and inoperative, to manifest in the soul.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Paushkara Agama*.

BALI

Land of Offerings



SPECIAL FEATURE

Ancient Outpost of Hinduism Thrives in Modern Times

BALI IS AN INTENSELY HINDU COMMUNITY, PERHAPS because it is the sole Hindu majority district in an otherwise Muslim country. Hinduism has not just survived here, it has thrived, unscathed by the tumultuous events of India's history over the last thousand years. Though elements of Balinese Hinduism

are unique in all the world, most of the daily life of Balinese Hindus is easily recognizable—the rituals, culture, traditions, rites of passage, etc. The main city, Denpasar, is a major tourist destination, but many Hindus live in “custom villages” run in a wonderfully traditional manner.

BY RAJIV MALIK,
DENPASAR, BALI, INDONESIA

FROM THE MOMENT I ARRIVED IN BALI in September of 2011, I found myself enveloped in Hinduism. My guide, attired in colorful Balinese traditional dress, greeted me at the airport, his hands in namaskar, with, "Om swasti astu." It means "May God shower grace upon you;" and that's how I felt. The 30-minute drive to my hotel took us past huge sculptures with scenes from the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Gita*. The hotel clerk, with the charming name Vidyawati Devi, likewise greeted me with "Om swasti astu," and as I left for my room, said goodbye with "Om shanti, shanti, shanti"—"peace, peace, peace." Every subsequent meeting for the next two weeks began and ended with such blessings.

In some ways, Balinese Hinduism reflects a deeper philosophic understanding and a fuller incorporation into daily life than found in India. For example, here cremations are not an occasion for sorrow and mourning, but festive celebrations of the soul's passing on to a better world. Balinese Hindus perform Trikal Sandhya, reciting the Gayatri Mantra and other Sanskrit slokas every day at 6 am, noon and 6 pm—a practice found in India among brahmins. A third example is Nyepi, the Day of Silence in which the island comes to a complete halt; even the electricity is shut off. Hindus stay indoors, praying and fasting. No vehicles are on the roads, the airport is closed and tourists must remain in their hotels. I cannot imagine such an observance taking place in secular India!

A Balinese Hindu's love for his religion is

clearly evident in his home. Each one I visited had an open-air temple, often larger than the main living area. In India, in the huge houses of rich Hindus, I have seen at most a small room used for a temple; in a middle-class home, the temple might be merely a four-foot by four-foot space partitioned off, as an afterthought, from a drawing room, bedroom or kitchen. Every Balinese home temple I saw was well maintained, with flower offerings being made two or three times a day.

I was becoming completely enthralled with the lifestyle—until it came time for dinner. Religious, kind and gentle though Bali's Hindus are, this is a land of meat eaters. Not a single vegetarian main course was available at any of the six restaurants in the Sannur Beach Hotel where I was staying. I took a cab that first evening in a fruitless effort to find a vegetarian restaurant nearby. Finally, I settled for toast and jam with hot chocolate milk back at the hotel. Eventually, with the help of friends, I located the few vegetarian restaurants Denpasar has to offer, but food remained a struggle throughout my stay. Even the sweets were often nonvegetarian. I returned to India a few kilos lighter.

Before we proceed with an account of my two weeks in Bali, a note: Many people have studied the religion and culture of Bali, and reached a variety of conclusions, nearly all based on an academic outsider's point of view. I've also come to Bali to give an account, but do not intend to impose any particular point of view. The people I interviewed will speak for themselves and you, the reader, may draw your own conclusions. That said, let's experience Bali!

Getting Started

DAY 1 I needed a journalist visa to visit Bali and report for HINDUISM TODAY. This was obtained with the kind help of Ngurah Arya Wedakarna Mahendradatta Wedasteraputra Suyasa III, a well-known local figure with a typically long Balinese formal name. Dr. Arya (for short) was the first person I met for an official interview. Just 36 years old, he is rector of the private 3,000-student Mahendradatta University, president of Sukarno Centre, and is involved with numerous local organizations. His father, who founded the university, was a prominent politician and associate of Sukarno, Indonesia's first president. The family traces their lineage back to the first king of Bali's Badung region.

On the short drive to Dr. Arya's office, I was impressed by Denpasar's well-developed commercial areas and excellent roads crowded with thousands of motor bikes. My cab driver explained that nearly every teenager owns one. Almost everyone on the roads was dressed in Western styles; apparently the traditional Balinese dress is for special occasions, or for the benefit of the tourists.

I spoke at length with Dr. Arya in one of the halls of his spacious campus in the heart of Denpasar city. He was outspoken about the problems and challenges that Hindu society faces in Bali. As an educator, he is pained that many Hindu youth are not pursuing higher education, which leaves them out of the top echelons of the corporate sector, especially in the area of tourism. He is concerned about the future, especially the impact of non-Hindus moving from less prosperous areas of Indonesia to Bali. He is impressed that the

youth remain proud of their Balinese culture even under the influence of more than two million tourists arriving yearly.

From the modern campus of Mahendradatta University, we drove to the outskirts of Denpasar and stepped back in time at the home of Ida Pedanda Gede Putra Telabah, one of Bali's best-known priests. Beautifully carved doors and windows adorned his large residential compound which contained a temple. His family is of brahmin lineage—yes, there are castes in Bali, but in different

form than in India—and his father was a priest. Telabah was educated as a doctor and taught at Udayana University until his retirement 14 years ago, at which time he took up the priesthood.

He told the story of Maharishi Markandeya who brought Hinduism to Bali around 500 ce. In 1500 ce, Maharishi Dvijendra came to Bali. And in the last half-century a number of modern Indian spiritual leaders, or their followers, have made an impact. "Originally," he explained, "the religion was known

as Teertha, because we use holy water for all kind of rituals." A tirtha (literally, a river ford) is any holy river, mountain or other place made sacred by its association with a Deity. Telabah told me the Balinese have spoken of Teerth Gango for a long time, even when it was only a name in the scriptures and they had no grasp of the immense river. As in India, one part of the puja is to mystically transform the water being used into Ganga water. This has quite a special meaning in Bali. As I met more and more people,



VISUAL BALI PHOTOGRAPHY

Bali: even more beautiful than they say...

(above) This large sculpture near Ngurah Rai International Airport depicts the pivotal moment in the Mahabharata when Karna attacks Ghatotkacha with the divine weapon Vasavi Shakti (originally intended for Arjuna); (left) panoramic view of Bali's terraced rice fields, some fashioned as far back as 500ce. They are maintained until today by farmer cooperatives.

I found that a great common desire is to go to India to bathe in the Ganga, something almost more sacred to them than to Hindus in India who live along its banks.

At one point in our interview, Telabah took a deep breath, closed his eyes and for a few minutes chanted Sanskrit mantras invoking the holy Ganga and praised India's other holy rivers whose banks host the Kumbha Melas. While chanting, the priest went into a meditative frame of mind; the mantras were flowing from him as if he were one with Mother Ganga. I really loved his reciting Ganga as "Gango" in his Balinese Sanskrit accent; it sounded divine and sweet.

Telabah estimates there are 600 priests from the brahmin community in Bali, but he acknowledged that using the word *caste*, or referencing anyone as "non-brahmin," can cause problems, and he avoids both. Priests come from all castes in Bali, trained in the guru-shishya tradition. Perhaps there will be a formal school established, he said, but it has not happened yet.

Women also can become priests, as has his wife, Ida Pedanda Stri Mayun Telabah. She helps him in the rituals and also performs rituals on her own. She told me there are about 400 priestesses in Bali. In nearly all cases, their husbands are also priests. "Not only do we get equal respect compared to the men, but sometimes we get more. As a woman priest, I also teach the basics of Hinduism to other women and my fellow priests. As well, we take up social work and help the sick and needy."

Telabah explained: "As a priest, we perform five types of yagna (ritual sacrifice): for the Gods, the ancestors, the rishis or gurus, for

man himself and for *bhoot*, the underworld. You could consider animals as the underworld." The puja system is the same all over Bali. He does puja at home and in the community, and at a temple if invited. "The number of temples in Bali cannot be counted," he



told me. "The Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are the most popular Gods in Bali for the common man. Even now, Balinese villages have their own way of puja, offerings and rituals."

Here, for the first time, I encountered the Balinese explanation of their practice of animal sacrifice (see p. 63 for a full report). They believe the practice can be justified from the *Vedas*. Telabah said, "Animal sacrifice is used in almost all the temples for the *bhutas*, the underworld. It is performed so that the ani-

mal gets a better life. The animals say, 'Thank you,' when sacrificed. If you are just killing an animal, it is violence. Sacrifice done with puja is not violence, it is a path to moksha, liberation, for the animal."

Telabah told me the Balinese believe they are still in the Dwapara Yuga and will bypass the Kali Yuga altogether if priests perform their duties well.

The Power of Tradition

From Telabah's house, we headed for the Dharma Sthapanam Foundation in Tanjung Bungkak to see Prabhu Darmayasa, a well-known spiritual teacher. In front of each store or shopping complex along the way one of the Hindu Gods presided, usually Ganesha. The ashram reminded me of the abodes of saints in Haridwar with its *dhuna*, sacred fire, burning continuously in the central temple—a place where devotees gather around the fire on mats to hear the spiritual teachings. Darmayasa greeted the devotees with "Radhe, Radhe," a custom brought from Vrindavan, home of his guru, Siddhayoga Acharya Shri Kamal Kishore Goswami, a great kundalini master.

Though I had been in touch with Darmayasa before coming to Bali, he had never seen HINDUISM TODAY until I handed him several copies at this first meeting. He questioned me at some length. After satisfying himself that I was indeed working for the betterment of dharma, he proved most helpful throughout the rest of my stay, even guiding me to the island's two most famous temples, Besakih and Tanah Lot.

In explaining why the religion is so strong in Bali, Darmayasa gave great importance to

samskara, or sanskar, as they say here. Literally the Sanskrit term means "impression" or "sanctification" and is used in both senses. A samskara is specifically a rite of passage, such as name-giving, first-feeding or marriage, but in its more general sense it means any experience or impression which has a significant impact in a person's life. "We Hindus have been living here in a peaceful way for centuries due to the sanskars given to us by our ancestors. It is because of them only that we are strong and powerful. In our tradition, a child is given sanskar as soon as he or she comes to the womb of the mother."

"Another way our ancestors made Bali safe was by constructing temples in all directions. These are not ordinary temples, but built through austerities." He went on to explain how five substances, *panchadhatus*, were placed in the ground in accordance with the *Ashtakaushala Kaushala*, their scripture on temple building. These five—gold, silver, copper, iron and ruby—are connected to the five elements. A similar procedure is followed in India; scholars believe it is derived from the *Saiva Agamas*. "We are a very small island, but the spiritual powers have protected us at all corners. Indonesia has more than 80 percent Muslims, but our spiritual powers are saving the whole nation." Balinese attribute their escape from the impact of the 2004 tsunami to the island's spiritual power.

A village in Bali is called a *desha*, which normally means country. Each *desha* has three temples, one each for Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The Brahma temple is placed near the village center, Vishnu's near the farms and Siva's near the cremation grounds. All land belongs to the village, not to any in-

dividual. "All have to come and serve the temple," he elucidated. "If you do not follow the code of the village, you will have to leave. But you cannot sell your home, as it belongs to the village." "Also," he went on, "if you convert to another religion, you have to leave the village. This is the tradition which is continuing for centuries and saving us today. It does not survive due to any lectures or speeches. We carry our tradition forward by simple pujas and the simple offering of *canang*, which you see everywhere. Our simple teaching is *karmaphala* (literally, "fruit of action"), meaning you will be rewarded as per your action—for example, cheat and you will be cheated. Due to this principle, people are afraid of doing wrong actions, which would only bring them trouble. When I was a child, there were hardly any Balinese prisoners in jail. They were afraid to commit a crime, afraid of the karmaphala." I heard again and again throughout my stay about karmaphala, explained to me in depth by elders and children alike.

Telabah described customs that are also common throughout India, such as daily worship in the home, here called *ngejot*, or the offering of each meal to God first. He said the caste system has undergone considerable change in Bali, though the family name continues to identify one's caste. "My ancestors were priests to the king, but we were named as sudras later on. I never faced any problem with this in Bali, but in India many eyebrows were raised when I proudly said I am a sudra. We do not feel there is anything wrong with it."

Dharmayasa has great pride in

Bali's practice of Hinduism. He pointed out that the Balinese never underwent the devastating invasions suffered by India, nor the systematic undermining of their culture as occurred under the British Raj. In particular, he told me, "We have huge ceremonies which are performed every five, ten and even 100 years. Millions participate. Other Hindus can learn from us how beautifully we collectively perform our rituals."

Life of a Priest

Later that day I visited the home of Ida Pedanda Sebali Tianyar Arimbawa, 68, chair of the Sabha Pandita, a body of priests affiliated to the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI). He told me he has been to India six times and is close to Sri Sri Ravi Shankar of Bengaluru. He said the Indonesian government supports each religion, and Hinduism is taught from elementary through university level. There are over ten thousand teachers of Hinduism in Indonesia's schools—"maybe more than in India."

Arimbawa told me the life of a priest is not particularly easy or profitable, but priests are highly respected. "We survive on the offerings of devotees, and the devotees understand this. For instance, when I was building my home, my devotees helped me, as they knew I was a man of limited means. Simi-



People and priests of Bali



(clockwise from above) Dr. Arya, young head of Mahendradatta University; Prabhu Darmayasa, a highly respected spiritual teacher and head of a large ashram; typical Balinese puja utensils include a bell, incense holder and lamp; high priest Ida Pedanda Gede Putra Telabah





ALL PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Holy water and abundant offerings typify Hindu life



(clockwise from above) Hindus bathe at the Tirta Empul ("Sacred Water") temple in Tampak Siring village, 39 km east of Denpasar; women in procession with offerings for their village temple in Kuta; the smaller offering called canang being used in worship; large offerings prepared for temple worship

larly, they help build the temples."

He continued: "Hinduism has survived in Bali for centuries because the essence of our religion is that we are people who have a culture of smiling. Bali was attacked by the terrorists [in 2002 and again in 2005—see p. 67] but the Hindus of Bali answered just with their smiles. We also responded by silence and prayers. We prayed every day to shower blessings on our country. We prayed not just for Hindus, but the whole of Indonesia. Each morning we continue to pray like that. Every day, all the time, there are ceremonies going on in Bali. We are praying for the welfare of all. We are getting the great power of blessing from Him."

Cultural/Religious Affairs

DAY On my second day I went to the Indian Cultural Centre, Bali, in the heart of Denpasar. Accompanying me was Dr. Sara Sastra, also known by his priest name of Ida Rsi Bhujangga Waisnawa Putra Sara Shri Satya Jyoti. The center is a branch of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, an official Indian governmental body headed by Dr. Karan Singh. Its job is to promote Indian culture in the host country. Usually a country has only one such center, but Indonesia has two, one in the capital, Jakarta, and this one in Bali. The Deputy Director, Bhuvneshwar Sharma, came to Bali two years ago; the center was started in 2006. In addition to Sharma, the Indian staff includes a yoga teacher and a dance instructor. The center participates in all major festivals, conducts classes in yoga, Bharatanatyam dance and Hindi, and issues 30 scholarships a year for Indonesian

students to study in India. Sharma said the small expatriate Indian community has successfully promoted Ganesha Chaturthi and other festivals not previously held here.

Sharma is a keen observer of Balinese life and culture, impressing even the knowledgeable Dr. Sastra with his insight. We share his observations in the sidebar on p. 27.

PHDI, the Official Hindu Body

I next visited the offices of the Parisada Hindu Dharma of Indonesia, or PHDI, the body that represents Hinduism to the government and plays an important role with the priesthood and the teaching of Hinduism in the public schools and villages. PDHI issues certificates to people of other religions who convert to Hinduism through the Shuddi Vidani ceremony conducted by the priests. There I met the Bali province head, Dr. Igusti Sudiana Ngurah, a lecturer of sociology, as well as the national head, Dr. Ketut Wiana, a retired lecturer and now full-time teacher of *Vedas* and *Puranas*.

Dr. Ngurah explained that PHDI adjudicates issues regarding Hindu practices and culture, including approving the yearly calendar before it goes to print—a complex job requiring input from the priests. In consultation with the government's Institute of Hindu Dharma, PDHI also has a say in the syllabus taught for Hinduism in the schools.

Dr. Wiana told me PDHI helps organize the big festivals such as Neiyp, the day of silence (see p. 56), and Galungan, which occurs every 210 days and lasts for ten days. It is a time the Gods visit the Earth. "Hinduism in Bali," he

told me, "is about *yagna* (sacrifice), *sushila* (ethics) and philosophy." He explained that conversion ceremonies occur either because a non-Hindu wants to marry a Hindu (the law requires couples to be of the same religion) or because of a person's strong interest in Hinduism. "Even Muslims can become Hindus, and the government has no problem with this." Before 1960, he explained, conversion from Hinduism to Christianity was occurring. "But in the past few years, many Hindus who had converted have come back to Hinduism."

Worship without Murtis

Later that evening we visited the home of Dr. V. Ramesh Sastry, an educational consultant who moved here from India and serves as secretary general of World Hindu Youth Organisation. Our rapport was instant when I gave him a copy of HINDUISM TODAY featuring on the front cover his guru, Sri Bharati Tirtha Swami, 2011 Hindu of the Year.

Sastry is impressed with Bali. "In other places in the world, Hindus live as different families and communities; but here in Bali, Hindus are like one big community living in one big house. The culture of the people is a big bonding force, and it is due to this that they have survived here for centuries."

The biggest difference between India and Bali, according to Sastry, is that in the tem-



ples of Bali there are no murtis, no images of God, and therefore no concept of darshan, or sight, of the murti which is popular in India. "During puja, they focus the mind on the temple's pedestal or padmasana and invite the God to come, then they make offerings. They identify the padmasana by putting different colors for each God: red for Brahma, black for Vishnu and white for Siva." One unusual result of this tradition: there is no clash with the Muslims over idol worship, because the Hindus are not worshipping idols.

Sastry says following Hinduism in Bali is expensive, a criticism I also heard from others. In part, the expense is being lessened by holding mass ceremonies for such events as cremations and for the "tooth filing" samskara. This ritual, not done in India, likely predates Hinduism's arrival here.

The custom villages, as they are called, have an ancient form of governance. "Here every person living in the village, including me," Sastry explained, "must report to the *banjar*, the village leader, as well as pay a fee. There are village programs which are mandatory for the local people, though I do not have to attend. In India, the guardians of society are the police, but here every street and corner of the village is covered by the *pachalaks*. Pachalaks are ordinary citizens, not police, who keep a vigilant eye on the activities of the community. It is like the neighborhood watch scheme that was implemented in cities like Delhi at one point in time."

"In India, if there is a marriage in your house it is your personal affair. You have the freedom to invite your neighbor or not to invite your neighbor. But here the marriage is not organized by you; it is the neighbors

who organize the marriage. Everything here is community-based; nothing is yours. You can only select the date of marriage for your daughter or son. You do not have the authority to invite or not invite. Here it is the banjar who will do everything. If there is a death in your house, it is the banjar which will take care of everything. A death is not your personal problem. It is a problem of the whole community. It is 100 percent community living here."

Sastry praises the Balinese: "The youngsters of Bali are very good at doing prayers. Indian youth today are running after something else and losing their concentration on God. The rest of the Hindu world should look at the Balinese people and thank them for upholding their culture so strongly. The rest of the world prays as individuals and as a family. But the Balinese pray as a person, as a family, as a community, as a society and even as a nation. They pray together on all kinds of good or bad occasions. This integrates the society, binding them together and bringing a strong sense of brotherhood."

Training Teachers of Hinduism

DAY 3 Next I visited the government-run Denpasar State Hindu Dharma Institute, an accredited college which trains Hindu teachers, preachers and priests. The Institute has 4,800 students, four professors and 120 lecturers (equivalent to an associate or assistant professor in the US system); it offers bachelor's, master's and PhD degrees. Instruction is focused on the four subjects taught in the public schools to Hindus: scriptures, faith, ethics and rituals. This is the largest of eleven simi-

lar institutes in the country.

At the entrance is a huge, beautifully carved stone Ganesha. The hall where I was taken had paintings of scenes from the *Mahabharata* all over the walls, plus a colorful Garuda and many other Hindu motifs. Even in India it would be difficult to find a government institution with such a divine touch of Hindu ambience.

The Institute's rector, Professor Titib, is an eminent scholar whose books on Hinduism are taught in universities, colleges and schools all over Indonesia. Titib earned his PhD from Gurukul Kangari University in Haridwar. That venerable college was set up in 1902 by a disciple of Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayananda Saraswati and is now a government-accredited institution.

In addition to their degree, teachers must also obtain government certification. There are currently 6,000 teachers of Hinduism in the country; 3,000 of those are in Bali. Five hundred new teachers are trained each year. The government has ordered that there be one religion teacher for every 20 to 25 students; presently the ratio is one to 40.

Every Hindu student in Indonesia takes two hours of classes a week in their religion from primary to university level and must pass an exam in Hinduism to graduate. Similar courses are provided for each religion.

Institute students who wish to become priests follow a different course of study. After graduation, they must get further training under an established priest. "You have to follow the guru-shishya parampara," Titib said. "This is the tradition from ancient times. We call it *aguron-guron*—to come and learn from the guru." I parted sharing my aston-

ishment at the existence of this government-run institution for the preservation of Hinduism, something not found in India. I later returned to lecture to the students about my experience at the Kumbha Melas.

Conversion on the Wane

DAY 4 Surpi Aryadharama, 30, is a university lecturer, journalist and author of a book in Indonesian on conversion in Bali. Between 1930 and 2008, according to her statistics, 27,500 people converted to Christianity or Catholicism (regarded by the Indonesian government as two separate religions). "The target of the missionaries is to make Bali a Christian island," she said; but with the population of Christians and Catholics just two percent, she does not think it possible. "I am optimistic because our youth are interested in learning about Hinduism, and now we have an Institute of Hindu Dharma here." Surpi was inspired by Swami Vivekananda and considers the late Satya Sai Baba to be her guru.

She is a brahmacharini: "If I marry, I will not be able to achieve my goal of working for Hinduism."

The Balinese have reduced Christian conversion significantly by opening Hindu orphanages, serving children without parents as well as some from poor families unable to care for them. There are now eight Hindu orphanages (vs. 37 Christian ones), and they are increasingly popular with the people. The one I visited appeared to be well run.

Later I met with Puneet and Neeta Maholtra, both from India, who run the Queen's restaurant chain in Bali—one of the few places I could get a decent vegetarian meal. They are prominent in the Bali-Indian Friendship Association, set up to bring the small expatriate Indian community closer.

Puneet observed that ancient customs found in village India are still followed here, such as never giving something with the left hand or pointing with a single finger, both considered inauspicious. He admired the Balinese sense of devotion and said, "To put it

bluntly, Hinduism in India is contaminated, but here in Indonesia it is still quite pure. They are so loyal to their religion and culture. I think we can all learn a lesson from their high level of commitment."

Bali's Hindu Doctrine

DAY 5 Dr. Somvir, a transplanted Indian who has taken Indonesian citizenship, generously shared with HINDUISM TODAY his wealth of knowledge about Bali.

The Balinese religion had traditionally been known as Agama Tirtham. In response to a strong anti-communist movement in Indonesia, the 1960s the government set up a ministry of religious affairs, promoting the doctrine of Panchashila (see p. 26) and requiring citizens to belong to an officially recognized religion. This was actually a matter of life or death, as the atheist communists were singled out for attack. But Agama Tirtham, though Hindu in origin and essence, was not granted official recognition.

Voices: Bhuvneshwar Sharma on what makes Bali different

MY EXPERIENCE IN BALI HAS BEEN VERY SWEET. HERE HINDUS DO not do any murti (image) worship. In their temples they have constructed three pillars, and they say these are for Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. In Bali, Hindus are living with great dignity. Every house in Bali has a temple.

These people have a lot of love and affection for Indians, for they feel their ancestors came from India. Now they are curious to learn Sanskrit language. That is the reason we are establishing a chair in collaboration with Mahendradatta University, so that Sanskrit can be easily taught here.

The caste system is strong here; but for the shudra it is not like India. There is no concept of untouchability here.

Muslims in Bali have Hindu names. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are a part of their normal lives, a part of their ancient culture. Some of them even believe that the *Ramayana* happened here. Muslims in Bali play the roles of different characters in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In their social life also, Hindus and Muslims do not have many differences. Even marriages are acceptable between the two religions. "Five hundred years ago, when Hindus came to Bali to save their religion, they started to eat pork because they felt then the Muslims would not try to convert them to Islam. The strategy worked; conversions were rare.

The priests here will use different mudras when they are performing a ceremony. One priest seated on a throne is the chief of the ceremony. He wears many rings in his fingers. He will hold the bell in various mudras while chanting the mantras. You will see a lot of en-

ergy on the face of the priest while he is doing the chanting.

When a ceremony is performed, both men and women have to be in traditional dress. They deeply meditate while doing the prayers and making the offerings. They do not keep any murtis in their homes, nor even calendars with pictures of Gods. Perhaps their system does not allow them to do so. They pray directly to the Formless.

In India we often hear about sattvic food and its affect on our bodies and minds. But in Bali, even though the people have nonvegetarian food, which is said to be non-sattvic, they are very peaceful and calm, not agitated in any way. In India the meat-eaters are more aggressive

and short tempered, but it is not like that here.

Balinese have *tantra vidya*, or black magic, to destroy their enemies. They have the eye to see the objects floating in the sky. It is because of the prevalence of black magic that they focus so much on the evil powers. Just as in the villages in India, mothers here do not allow their children to go out after dark. They also have the system of lemon and green spices being used to prevent the evil forces from acting on their dear ones.

Parents here do not worry about their daughter's marriage. The children just go home and inform

their parents about their choice. Mostly the parents accept it, regardless of the caste and religion of the proposed match. Occasionally there is resentment, but ultimately the marriage is accepted. This system has been going on here for many generations. There is no dowry here; most of the expense of the marriage is incurred by the parents of the boy. The whole system of marriage is simplified. A daughter is not considered a liability.

Panchashila: Indonesia's national ideology

Indonesia follows an ideology called *Panchashila*, "Five Principles." According to the government explanation, *Panchashila* are the five inseparable and interrelated principles at the heart of Indonesia. Each is depicted on the national seal, a Garuda, the courageous, divine, golden eagle of the *Ramayana*, whose image is found in many ancient Indonesian temples.

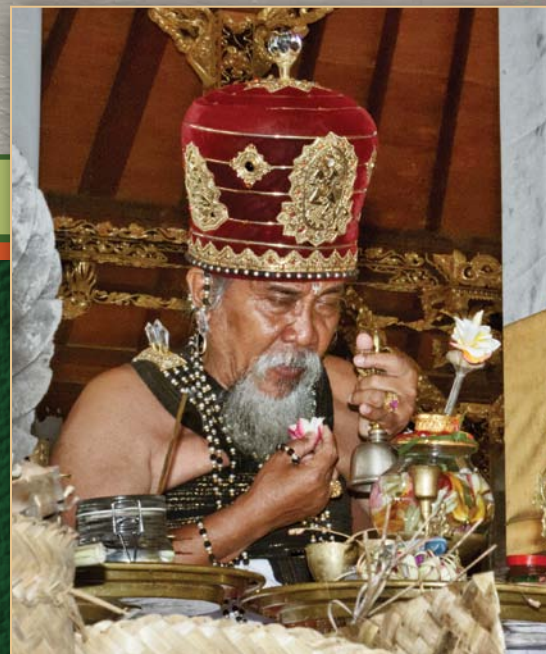
The principles are 1) Belief in the one and only God (represented by the star in the shield); 2) Just and civilized humanity (chain); 3) The unity of Indonesia (banyan tree); 4) Democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives (bull); and 5) Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia (rice and cotton). These are often generalized to refer to: religious devotion, humanitarianism, nationalism, consultative democracy and social justice. The country's motto (from a 14th century poem) is held in Garuda's talons: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, "Unity in Diversity."



GOVERNMENT OF INDONESIA



Besakih, the Mother Temple



(top) Staircase to the main temple of Besakih; (above) the high priest performing worship; (left) devotees gather in front of the three pedestals (on the left side, behind the yellow, white and red umbrellas) to participate in the puja, which includes group recitation led the priest in white at the small covered shrine to the right in the photo



Pandit Narendra Dev Shastri Shastriji was instrumental in devising a solution. Sent to Bali in his early 20s by the Birla Foundation to propagate Hinduism, Shastriji settled here permanently and married a Balinese girl. He helped to articulate Hinduism in a manner consistent with the Panchashila doctrine, while not altering the traditional core Hindu beliefs and practices. (Though of Arya Samaj background, he did not promote its reformist teachings here.) He convinced the Balinese to call themselves Hindus, put forward the *Ve-das* as their holy books and say they believe in one God. He had them adopt the Gayatri Mantra as a main prayer and regularized a set of mantras already in use for puja.

Shastriji developed and implemented the Tri Sandhya, a regimen of six Sanskrit prayers said three times a day, beginning with the Gayatri Mantra. The six prayers are:

- 1) Lord is the Earth, Sky and the Heavens. Let us meditate on the light of the sun, which represents God, and may our thoughts be inspired by that divine light.
- 2) Lord, Narayana is all that has been and what will be, free from taint, free from dirt, ever existing and without form, holy god Narayana, He is only one and there is no other.
- 3) Lord, you are called Shiva, Mahadeva, Iswara, Parameswara, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Purusha, the supreme soul, source of everything.
- 4) Oh Lord, I am full of sorrow, my action is full of sins, my soul so destitute, and my birth is also so poor. Save me from all this sorrow, purify my body and mind.
- 5) Lord, forgive me Mahadeva, He who gives salvation to all sentient beings, save me

from all this sorrow, guide me, redeem and protect me, O Sada Shiva.

6) Lord, Forgive my sinful deed, forgive my wrong speech, forgive my sinful mind, forgive me for all those misdeeds. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

With these formulations and innovations, "Hinduism was recognized, and a crisis was averted," Somvir concluded.

Bali has benefitted from the recent movie, "Eat, Pray, Love," which ended with star Julia Roberts finding true love in Bali. The resourceful Balinese quickly adjusted their tourism advertising to include all three goals on their beautiful island, resulting in an increased popularity of yoga for tourists. In Bedugul, North Bali, Dr. Somvir is developing the Maharishi Markandeya Yoga City project, intended to be the biggest center of yoga, meditation and ayurveda in the world. Some Balinese oppose him, thinking he plans to impose the Indian version of Hinduism on them. Shastriji faced similar fears; ultimately, during the later part of his life, he was isolated from the community. Perhaps to avoid a similar fate, Somvir promotes yoga and not Hinduism as such. In addition, his target audience is more international than local.

The Mother Temple

DAY 6 The Mother Temple, holiest in all of Bali, is located at 3,610 feet on the slopes of Bali's highest mountain, Mount Agung, an active volcano rising 10,308 feet. Lava flows from a huge 1962 eruption that killed 2,000 people missed the temple by just a few meters. The Balinese believe Agung is a fragment

of India's Mount Meru, brought by the first Hindus.

Darmayasa kindly agreed to be my guide for the day. To reach the temple, we drove two and a half hours through interior villages with spectacular rice terraces, cooperatively maintained and dating back hundreds of years.

Mother Besakih Temple is, in fact, a complex made up of 22 temples. Its numerous courtyards and brick gateways are connected by stepped terraces and flights of stairs which finally lead up to the central shrine, Pura Penataran Agung, built in the 17th century. You can take a quick tour of this and other Balinese temples at bit.ly/balitemples.

Arriving at the temple complex, we proceeded to the Pura Goa Raja cave temple, the mandatory first place of worship. I changed into the traditional sarong and head dress required for entrance into any temple in Bali. From the parking area we descended a flight of several hundred stairs to reach the temple. Most temples in Bali are open air, but this one is located inside a cave.

The story is that once there was an evil king who harassed his people. The Gods came to destroy the king, riding three serpents: Brahma from the Earth on Ananta-bhoga Naag, Vishnu from the water on Basuki Naag and Ishwar from the sky on Takshaka Naag. It is images of these three serpents, or naags, that are enshrined here. "The idea," Darmayasa explained, "is that if the earth, water and wind maintain a good balance, then the world becomes a peaceful place. This temple balances these three elements for the welfare of the world."

Training the next generation

(right) Students in the Institute's music class learn flute, drum and a rack of variously-tuned gongs. These instruments together (plus others) comprise a gamelan orchestra, for which Bali is famous. (below) Ganesha murtis abound in Bali; in this murti at the Institute Ganesha is reading a book.



ALL PHOTOS: VISUAL BALI



Walking up the stairs, we proceeded to the Lakshmi temple for a short puja and then started up the grand staircase to the main sanctum. By this time it was late afternoon. The weather was extremely pleasant, and we could see the clouds floating just a few hundred feet above us. The area up to the sanctum was landscaped with plants and trees. Beautiful red flowers grew on each side of the stairs.

As I climbed, I was more and more charmed by the majesty and magnificence of this structure. When one set of flights ended, I found myself on a platform where the view—both down below and up to the temple above—was breathtaking. The serenity and divinity of the surroundings brought me to a completely meditative state. I was rendered blissful and speechless.

Scores of devotees in white, carrying yellow and white umbrellas, were coming down the stairs. Darmayasa explained that they had worshiped at the Mother Temple to establish their ancestors as devatas among the Gods.

Passing through a narrow entrance at the top of the stairs, we came into a courtyard dominated by a large platform in front of a row of temples. The three main structures represent Sadasiva, Parasiva and Siva. Puja was in progress for a group of a hundred who had arrived before us. A large number of foreign tourists watched from a distance but did not take part.

Soon it was our turn for puja. As with

most pujas in Bali, it began with preparatory prayers by the priest followed by recitation of six slokas as a group. At the conclusion, the priest sprinkled holy water on all of us and gave out rice from the puja. We applied this as a tilak to the forehead, and, in the unique Bali style, also to the temples and earlobes.

The open-air temples of Bali are quite different from the closed-in temples of India where even forced air circulation may be insufficient. Here the openness to the sky overwhelms your senses and connects you with the divine as the Vedic mantras are chanted and flower offerings are made.

In India you would always leave your shoes at the temple entrance and proceed barefoot, even a long distance, for worship. But here, the Balinese walk about in the temple with their shoes on. Only for puja were their shoes removed and placed by their side.

Our worship complete and evening upon us, we headed back to Denpasar. Our route took us through Ubud, the famed art center, where we stopped briefly for dinner; I would come back in a few days for a much longer visit (see p. 60). We met Ketut Suardana and his Australia-born wife, Janet De Neefe. Together they run a chain of restaurants and guest houses, and Janet, an author, organizes the yearly Ubud Writers and Readers Festival. They are a successful cross-national couple with four children. Janet much of her life here in *Fragrant Rice*, a book of insightful reflections on her own melding with Ba-

lines life, plus her favorite local recipes. (See excerpts on p. 34 and 67)

Ketut told me his wife became a Hindu by choice when they married. Janet explained, "I am a Hindu officially. But I am still understanding it, as it is a complex religion. There is a worldwide trend of Westerners taking to Buddhism, I think because it is easier. Hinduism is a very gentle kind of artistic religion here."

Cremations

DAY 7 On my seventh day, from morning to late afternoon, I had the unusual experience of attending a cremation ceremony for a complete stranger, something never done in India (see p. 64 for a full report on cremation in Bali). It was quite an adventure; the Balinese do not mourn, weep or wail as the funeral proceeds, but rather celebrate the person's life and their transition to higher realms.

Developing Hindu Resources

DAY 8 Today Dr. Sara Sastra took me to Denpasar to visit the Dwijendra Foundation's school, a private institution serving 4,000 students. Its mission is to produce "Hindu human resources" to improve the knowledge of the Hindu people of Bali in religion, culture and literature. The school was founded in 1953 by Shri Dang Hyang Dwijendra, named after an 8th century Javanese priest of the same

name who built Besakih Temple.

It was the first such institution in Bali. It was here Pundit Shastri and others developed the concept of Tri Sandhya, the thrice-daily prayer of Gayatri mantra at 6am, noon and 6pm, which has been implemented for Hindus all over Indonesia.

As I entered, I was struck by two things: the huge statues of Goddess Saraswati and Lord Ganesha at the entrance and the hundreds and hundreds of motorbikes parked chockablock in exquisitely precise rows beside the buildings. It seems nearly every older student has one—a testament to the relative prosperity of Balinese Hindus.

The Foundation's vice-chair, Shri M.S.

Chandra Jaya, took us on a tour of the neat, clean and well-maintained classrooms. The likes of this Hindu school could hardly be found in all of India. Here I was as much an object of inquiry to the children as they to me; they especially loved to hear about the four Kumbha Melas I'd been to. When I asked if they would like to visit India, nearly every hand went up. All wanted to go to Haridwar to bathe in the Ganga.

The school gives a complete secular education up to college B.A. level. Jaya explained that 99 percent of the students are Hindus. This is their main campus; a few other schools use the Foundation's name but run independently. The government provides

funds for books and sponsors a free education for 250 children each year. He said that as a matter of government policy, they cannot call it a Hindu school, even though there are Muslim schools. They are working toward a change so that it can be so designated.

The school has 12 teachers of Hinduism and a yoga instructor. Fees are nominal, only US\$0.56/month for kindergarten and \$1.36 for secondary school, just enough to cover expenses; children from orphanages attend free. "We have a small number of seats compared to the demand for admission," Jaya told me. "Anyone who graduates from here is looked upon as someone who will take care of the future of Hinduism in Bali. They are

Voices: Dr. Sara Sastra on Balinese Hindu philosophy

THE FIRST HINDU EMPIRE IN INDONESIA WAS THE KULAVARMAN Kingdom, around the 4th century ce. It is said that our ancestors came from both South India and Orissa. During the Muslim period, our link with India was cut; and we remained out of touch until recently. The Saiva, Shakta, Tantra, Puranic, Vaishnava and Buddhist traditions have all been combined here and called Saiva Siddhanta Indonesia. Vaishnavism is not pure here as it is in India. Here Vaishnavas worship Siva.

Balinese Hinduism is Saiva Siddhanta; we believe in both dvaita and advaita concepts. If you say God is different from the human being, the Balinese will accept it. And if you say God is the same as human, we accept that also. All this makes Balinese very strong.

Balinese people are strong because of their ancient belief, which makes them very flexible. They can adopt anything that is good as their custom. But if something is not good, then it is thrown away.

Balinese people move around with their families. It is not consider good to go alone, for example, to the temple. If you go with your family, it is loved by God.

Mainly there are two types of priests: the high priest and the temple priest or the normal priest. Temple priests are called *pemangku* or *pinanditha*. They take care of conducting all the ceremonies in the temples. They are akin to the pujaris in India and are also called assistant to the high priest.

The articles I use as a priest are called *Siva upakarana*, the utensils for Siva worship, of which the most important is the bell. This ceremony is being done by both my wife and me and is called Ardhnanarishwari, after the form of Siva as half-man and half-woman. The mantras jointly recited by us become more sacred than if recited individually. We put water in a special bowl and then pray to Ganga to convert it to holy water. At the beginning of the puja, we wear simple clothes, then in the middle we change, with the idea to protect ourselves. First we purify ourselves, then ask God to sit inside us. The priest becomes Siva. After this we wear a formal dress and crown and proceed with the puja.

There are many restrictions for a high priest. I cannot drive any ve-

hicle. I am not supposed to go shopping. I cannot go to a cinema hall or any place associated with gambling or prostitution. I have to practice vegetarianism. Finally, I have to leave my home accompanied by at least one person."

We have special people here who construct the temples called *undagis*. We worship Vishwakarma, the divine architect. We do bhumi puja to start a house, building or temple. When the construction is finished, with the ceremony of *malapas* we bless the physical material of the building to come alive, in a sense, so people feel sheltered and protected in it. We bury five substances, *pancha dhatu* (gold, silver, copper, iron and ruby), which are connected to the five elements, *pancha mahabhutas* (earth, air, ether, fire and water) and in turn to the *pancha mahadevas*, five Deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Isvara, Mahadeva and Siva). This was taught by our ancestors coming from Maharishi Markandeya. As a high priest, I am qualified to perform the *pancha yagnas*, the five sacrifices for the Gods, the rishis, the humans, the ghosts and the ancestors. Perhaps these traditions all came from India.

The tooth filing ceremony or *samskara* is local to Bali, but even it is connected to the Hindu religion through the story of Ganesha's broken tusk. In this ceremony we file the six front teeth on the upper jaw. These represent: *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *mada* (pride), *irshya* (jealousy) and *moha* (attachment). This is done for all children.

When we deal with an evil spirit, we address it as *saumya*, "gentle one." We offer it something, and then turn it into a God. There is no killing of evil, we want to recycle. Siva is not the destroyer, Siva recycles and does not destroy.

In Balinese Hinduism, if you were to say something created by God is *haram*, prohibited and bad, it means God is bad. It is, after all, created by God, and why will God make something bad? It would mean God is bad also. We say that everything created by God is holy.

You have to understand that Indonesia is not an Islamic country. So far as the *bhumiputra* ("son of the land") concept is concerned, we Balinese Hindus are *bhumiputra*. We have not come from outside.



Youth apply Hinduism to daily life



A class at the junior high school of Dwijendra Institute respond enthusiastically when asked, "Who would like to visit India?"



Voices: Dr. Litt I Gusti Putu Phagunadi on Balinese Saivism

THERE IS ORTHODOX HINDUISM AND MODERN HINDUISM. IN Indonesia we follow orthodox Hinduism, which may also be called Brahmanism. Modern Hinduism has been influenced by Islam and was subjected to reformation by Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanjacharya and others. The orthodox interpretation of Hinduism in the *Vedas* includes animal sacrifice. Our Hinduism in Bali is the most ancient. The level of understanding of Hinduism is higher in Bali than in India.

Hinduism is very flexible. It will develop and adjust itself according to (as we say in Balinese) *desh, kala and patra*—region, time and space.

The term *Saiva Siddhanta* fits us well in Bali because we worship God at three levels: Parama Siva, the highest, called by us Ida Sanghyang Widi Wasa, "Big Almighty Lord;" then Sada Siva and then Siva. Parama Siva is formless. Sada Siva is Ardhanarishwari. Ardhanarishwari is *nirguna* and *saguna* both, with form and without form. It is Siva and Shakti. The third form, Siva, is worshipped by us as a king. This is Saiva Siddhanta. No other Hindu sect follows this. Most temples in Bali are Siva temples.

We follow Durga and Siva. Siva and Durga (or Parvati) are two sides of the same coin. If we want something magical, we worship Durga.



Every home worships Durga every fifteen days with animal sacrifice.

There are three paths: left, right and middle. The left path has powers like the magical powers of the tantrics of Bengal. Such powers are here in Bali even now. Right now, you see me as a human being, but at night you can see me as an animal. Until today, many Balinese can do this. This is called *vama marg*, left power. If a person with such powers just touches your hand, your hand may stop moving.

We do not want the tourists to disturb the holiness of our temples. We have a dress code, and they have to follow it. Tourism generates a lot of money for Bali and also for our religion. Many come here to see the yagna worship, which they have never seen before.

In Bali we believe that if we think good, speak good and act good, only then will we go to heaven—this is called Triakaya Parisuddha. Then we have the philosophy of three *hitakarana* which means good to the nature, good to the human beings and good to the Lord. Finally we have the *pancha yagna*: sacrifice to human beings, animals, Lord, ancestors and rishis. The whole philosophy of Balinese Hinduism can be summed up in these three precepts. If we follow these, we will attain Sada Siva.



also considered to have the essential qualities required for a good Hindu priest."

Ketut Wantra, a 9th grade Hinduism teacher, said he was teaching about the avatars, Hindu ethics, ancient philosophy and the history of Hinduism. "We try to teach the children to be humble. For example, if somebody is handsome, he should not be proud of it. We each have to remember that we all have good points and minus points. We teach about karmaphala, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Religion and morality provide guidance to our children on how they should lead their lives in today's times."

Fellow Hinduism teacher, Gusti Ayu Nyoman Kartika, shared: "We try to teach not only theory, but the practice of Hinduism as well. We teach bhajans, yoga, mantras and how to make an offering in the temple. The children go to the school temple every day and make a small offering, called *canang*. On full-moon day all 4,000 students—each in traditional Balinese dress—make big offerings and perform puja together at the temple."

The teachings clearly have an impact on the students. Luh Putu Citra Dwi, 17, told me, "Hinduism helps us to maintain calmness and peacefulness. My concentration power has improved immensely, and my behavior towards others has become more friendly. Our teachers, such as Mrs. Kartika, are close to us, and they influence our lives in a greater way. What makes our school different is the focus on Hinduism."

We learn other subjects to pass our exams, but we learn Hinduism to put it into practice in our lives. In general Hinduism makes all of us wiser and develops our power to judge what is good and what is bad. My aim is to become a doctor and a good human being who is useful to society."

Class 9 student, A.A. Ngr. Satria, 15, said, "I love my religion and am proud of it. Hinduism has inspired me to become a better human being. According to the *Gita*, we must protect those who are weak. I love the Mother Besakih temple. In my normal life, I wear Western clothes, but I don traditional Balinese dress for the temples. I was never taught to be a vegetarian while practicing Hinduism. I love meat, have it every day, and will never be a vegetarian."

Insights Into a Remarkable Culture

DAYS 8-12 During my last few days in Bali, I attended personal ceremonies at Dr. Sastra's house (see p. 54-55). I also accompanied him to the large campus of Bali's Hindu University, where he teaches ayurveda. Despite its name, this is a private, secular institution; Hinduism is taught only as part of its regular course of study, as in any other university here.

On an auspicious day at Dr. Sastra's home I attended a ceremony for another family. On a second visit to Ubud, Bali's art center, I met P. T. Damar Wayan of the erstwhile royal family of Ubud. He offered explanations about Bali's culture, philosophy and art, especially how it is all preserved as an obligation of the entire community, not just a few individuals. Finally, I met again with Dr. Arya and his Bali Youth Forum and made a good-bye visit to Darmayasa ashram.

During my flight home, images of my wonderful time in Bali came one by one before my eyes. Bali, I had learned, had one extra samskara, tooth-filing, over and above the sixteen samskaras delineated in scripture. I was pondering how to have this samskara and obtain an edge over all my Indian Hindu brethren. In a quick vision, I saw the high priest wearing his diamond-studded headgear performing the tooth filing ceremony on me. Just then I opened my eyes and took a sip of the chilled lemon juice the stewardess had served. Unexpectedly, some of my teeth were extra sensitive to the cold. I convinced myself it was due to the tooth filing completed a few seconds back by the high priest. I smiled and felt blessed that I was now carrying a lasting touch of Balinese Hinduism to India.

(above) Tanah Lot, one of Bali's most famous temples and a huge tourist attraction. It is set on a jetty of land out in the sea reached by a path that is under water at high tide. During our correspondent's visit, hundreds of tourists were standing on the shore and rocks below the temple witnessing a spectacular sunset. Only those coming to worship are actually allowed inside the sanctuary. (right) The high priest at Tanah Lot performs puja before the central pedestal, which holds no murti or sculpted image, as it represents God's formless state. After the puja one can sit for meditation on the high central platform overlooking the ocean.



ALL PHOTOS VISUALBALI.COM

“My Continuing Love Affair with Bali”

In *Fragrant Rice*, transplanted Aussie Janet De Neeffe shares her insight into island life as experienced with her husband Ketuk and their children

BALINESE COSMOLOGY IS BASED ON THE principle that the universe is divided into three spaces: the underworld, place of Brahma, lies to the south, in the direction of the sea; the middle space, place of Siwa, is where mankind lives; and the heavens, place of Wisnu, lies to the north, the direction of the mountains and lakes. The same cosmic laws that apply to the universe, the macrocosmos, also apply to humans, the microcosmos. They apply to all levels of life, the seen and the unseen: how the Balinese see their place in the universe, how they live their everyday lives, how they set up their homes and even how they prepare and eat their food.

The soul, or atman, is the venerated essence of the individual, the unseen and untouchable, everlasting spirit. The Balinese believe that a life of purity and virtue will lead them to their fundamental origin: God himself, or Brahma, the Supreme Being; but there are many steps of higher learning required for entry to this holy paradise. The body is the vehicle of the soul and represents the flesh and blood that can lead the atman astray. The penalty for straying is empowered by the law of karma: the fruits of our deeds that may be manifested either in this world or the next.

On the physical plane, the head is believed to be the spiritual center, the body is the home of man and earthly desires, and the feet are connected to the land of evil, illness and negative forces. The head is the seat of wisdom, knowledge and power; it is the temple of Brahma, the soul of our being. At the temple, it is the head that receives the holy grain that helps unite our spiritual power after prayer. The *udang*, the cloth that men tie around their heads to wear to the temple, is like an antenna that opens a direct link to God, a means of focusing on the soul and receiving blessings. Tied at the front, the knot of the *udang* points to heaven, the land of the deified ancestors and God. The sarong tied around the waist points to the netherworld. Between these worlds, we must maintain balance and harmony by observing the laws of dharma, the way of virtues. The head is sacred and you should never touch the head of anyone older than you or of greater importance.

Although the body is the location of earthly desires, it is also revered as a symbol of

worldly splendor. It seems that in striving to attain eternal liberation, or moksha, it helps if you are beautiful and well groomed, for the Balinese are surely one of the world's most graceful people and attention to personal hygiene and cleanliness is paramount. After washing, the aromatherapy ritual begins with the application of fragrant creams and oils to their soft skin and hair.

As in the West, the Balinese ideal of female beauty is a slim hourglass figure with tiny waist, slender arms and glossy black hair (not brown like mine). An overweight body is a sign of imbalance and lack of harmony, proof that worldly passions obviously prevail. The body is treated with great respect, and this is evident in the poise and grace of each person. Movement of the body is gentle and slow, and handshakes are a featherweight, a polite gesture of contact rather than a show of strength. In prayer, there is a certain way to hold your hands and even cross your feet when kneeling. The Balinese innate self-assuredness comes from knowing exactly who they are, where they are going and what happens when they get there. It is only people without that faith in their place in the universe who need to “find themselves.”

In Bali, the hands create and receive magic and mystery and are sacred symbols of strength, creativity and skill. The right hand represents Brahma, the creator, and the left hand represents Wisnu, the protector. The right hand receives all that is good, and the left hand receives impure, suspicious things. When we unite our hands to pray, the union

of the hands, called *desa indria*, represents the ten tools of the body.

It has taken me many years of observation to be able to verbalize the subtleties of how the Balinese use their hands. I've watched as they've gently ground spices, prayed with fragrant flowers in the temple, drunk scented holy water after praying, mixed and bruised vegetables, massaged the weary limbs of my children and made beautiful offerings from young coconut leaves. For the Balinese, the hands provide a link with God and the ancestors through prayer and the receiving of holy water, and a link with friends, family and others through love and affection. The powerful mantras and hand gestures of the chanting priest at a temple festival is a hypnotic act of beauty and mysticism. The expressive gestures of a Balinese dancer or the graceful blessings of offerings on the night of the dark moon echo a thousand memories of ancestors and ancient times. When my children say the Trisandhya, or Gayatri at the temple, the sacred hymn from the *Rig Veda*, they unite their hands in a manner that echoes the shape of a lotus flower, the symbol of everlasting life. And from an early age, they were taught to receive gifts by cupping the right hand over the left, and to give in return with the same right hand. The magic of all these movements is an expression of love,

Bali's sacred life: Janet De Neeffe and her husband Ketut with their four children (left to right) Laksmi, Arjuna, Krishna and Dewi



COURTESY JANET DE NEEFFE

Bali's sacred life: a typical offering

respect and harmony with nature.

I have watched many Balinese preparing food and have come to the conclusion that the hands are the element that brings life and vitality to the ingredients, be it through mixing, grinding or chopping. The deliberate circular motion of mixing the ingredients is an echo of an ancient Hindu mantra that protects all those within the circle, just as Lakshmana drew the circle to protect Rama's wife, Sita, in the *Ramayana*. The hands can assist in the delicate art of balancing textures and flavors through feeling and, of course, are the means by which the results are carried to the nose for the final appraisal.

If you wander into a Balinese compound, you will see that it is set out in a certain pattern. In the entrance way beyond the gates, there is usually a small pond to absorb evil spirits and a path that leads you right or left. This is a subtle trick to confuse evil spirits, who, luckily, cannot turn corners. Beyond the gates and temple, the compound unfolds into a network of small cottages, with wide verandahs and small windows, surrounding the central pavilion or *bale dauh*.

In the early hours of the morning, food and rice for the daily meal is transformed by fire and water. For this, the Balinese give thanks by making offerings. Small squares of banana leaf, called *saiban*, are graced with a few grains of rice and a tiny amount of cooked food. The blessings are then put in magically charged places around the compound. Only after rice and food for the offerings has been set aside may the people eat. The Balinese believe that if you don't share your food with the spirits, harm and bad fortune will certainly come your way. Therefore, good and evil spirits are treated equally.

Several families usually live together in the compound, including parents, aunts, uncles, children and the married sons. It is communal living, where everyone has certain duties and commitments to family. The sons stay with their parents and the daughters follow their husbands and set up house in his family compound. I often wonder how we will accommodate our own daughters and whether they will live with their parents-in-law or choose to have a place of their own, as Ketut and I did. Ketut was from such a large family that they pooled their resources and bought land for each brother and sister to set up their own compounds.

Offerings are a way of life in Bali. Every day, small coconut-leaf trays containing petals, leaves and rice are placed at busy crossroads, outside shop fronts, in shrines and homes. A walk into town becomes like a spiritual journey, each step marked by a precious feast of Mother Nature's bounty and saturated with



the perfume of incense, the holy scent that follows you from house to house. The dashboards of cars and motorbikes also enjoy these sacred blessings as a protection from the evil spirits that linger on the roads. On auspicious days, more elaborate offerings are made. In the afternoon of the full moon, you'll see smouldering coconut husks at the entrance of each compound, gently burning amidst bright flowers and decorative coconut leaves, their fragrance trailing quietly to heaven. The phases of the moon and sun determine the schedule and size of these offerings, and all Balinese Hindus follow these time-honoured rituals.

The five elements of air, fire, water, earth and ether are the catalysts to activate the spirit of the offering. The Balinese believe that the world is a place occupied by many beings, good and evil, seen and unseen. Great care must be taken to ensure that balance and harmony is maintained between all members of this metaphysical world. I heard a friend telling Ketut how she sometimes sleeps on the beach at night. He was very disturbed by this and replied that the world does not exist only for humans. The sea is not always a playground for people and it does not belong to us during the hours of darkness. Negative energies awaken after midnight and occupy areas such as the oceans, and they should be respected as they can create havoc with our health, mind and our energy, known as *bayu*. If illness or trauma disturbs the gentle force of our consciousness, then offerings must be made to revive the spirit and restore the troubled soul to normality.

The making of offerings is a way of quietly practicing the worship of God to cleanse your mind and control worldly passions. It is an act of love and respect that enriches a

pure heart and helps us receive the wisdom and guidance of God. The essence of offerings is contained in Krishna's advice to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He explains that the perfect gift to God should contain leaves, flowers, fruit and water in order to receive His blessings. Incense and flowers symbolize prayers, and water symbolizes spiritual purification. Whether great or small, this is the recipe for all offerings.

More than eighty offerings are placed around our compound each day in cosmic hot spots determined by the priest. These generally consist of small coconut-leaf squares laden with red, yellow, pink and blue petals, a slice of areca nut and betel leaves smeared with lime paste, fragrant shredded pandan leaves and some cooked food with a sprinkling of rice and fried shallots.

Before we built our house, we were instructed to make offerings to the spirits of the land in order to maintain the harmony of nature and safeguard our family. A *daksina* for building, an offering comprising a shaved coconut, Chinese coins, leaves and rice, along with several bricks wrapped in cloth, was buried in the foundations on a day chosen by the priest. Some people say the *daksina* ignites the spirit of the land; others say the coconut inside represents us, members of the human world. These offerings are nestled under every building on our property.

Larger offerings for ceremonies and grand festivities are spectacular displays of creativity and beauty. I will never tire of seeing Balinese women carrying offerings on their heads to the temple.

Janet De Neeffe and husband Ketut have four children and own two restaurants in Ubud. Her book *Fragrant Rice* is both a cookbook and a charming account of her life in Bali.



NIPANK SHROFF

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Hindu Wedding

The Sacred Rites of Matrimony

Excerpted from *Vivaha Samskara, The Hindu Wedding Ceremony*

Published by the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference



In this Educational Insight, we present a pictorial summary of the Hindu wedding ceremony, with text drawn from a new book, Vivaha Samskara, designed particularly for Hindus living in the diaspora and released in 2011 as a guide to this sacred event. It encompasses all the basic aspects of the traditional rites and incorporates a few key innovations for contemporary times.

It all started at the wedding of my daughter Rupali in 2005. Right after the wedding ceremony, the daughter of a family friend informed me that she had just gotten engaged and wanted me to be her wedding *purohita* (priest). I had never done this before, so I did not accept immediately. Having attended many Hindu weddings in the US over the last two decades, I felt that the ceremony could be made more meaningful to the couple and the invited guests, since most people do not understand Sanskrit, the language of the ceremony. I accepted the request after studying the subject in depth. ¶ After officiating one wedding, I was requested by many Hindu friends and acquaintances to officiate their children's weddings. In the meetings prior to these weddings, I always explain the ceremony and its significance to the couple. Due to the lack of a reference book in



COURTESY DEEPAK KOTWAL

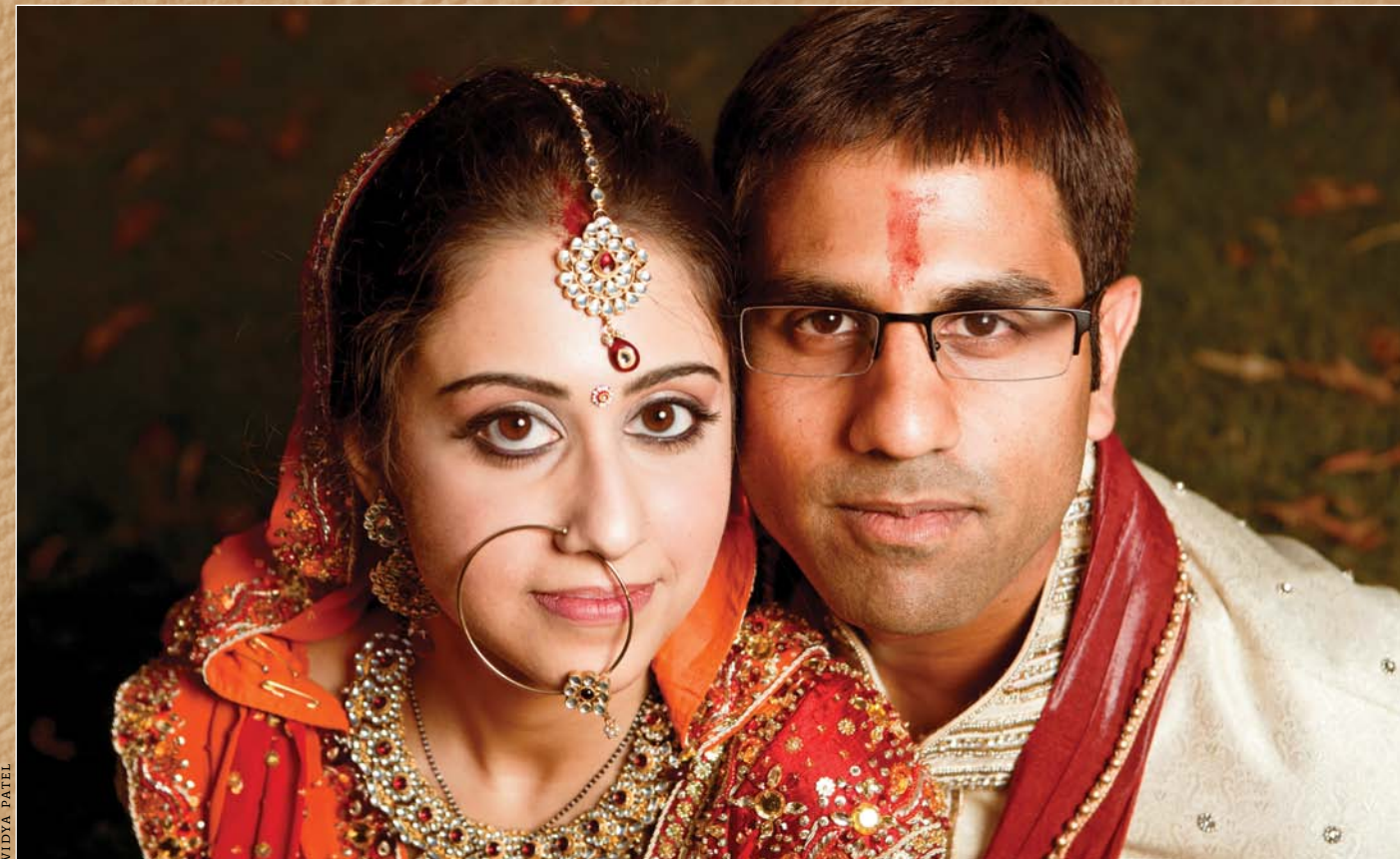
Marriage ties: (left) A couple walks around the *homa kunda* as they embark on a lifetime of joyful and fruitful togetherness during their marriage ceremony. (above) Deepak Kotwal, primary author of *Vivaha Samskara*, conducts a wedding in his community.

English, I decided to write a book specifically for the Hindu diaspora and even Hindus in India. I met Shri Sanjay Mehta, an active member of the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), after I started writing. With his encouragement, it was decided that the book would be published under the auspices of the HMEC, as it neatly complemented the common objective of sustaining Hindu Dharma.

From the Preface, by Deepak Kotwal

To order the book go to: www.Hindu-Wedding.org

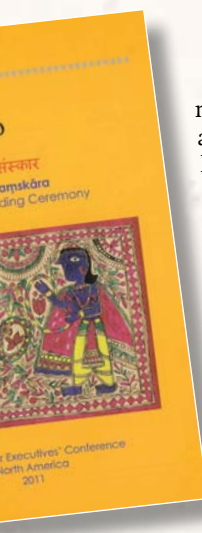
TECHNICAL ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE WITH PHOTO SELECTION & CAPTION WRITING BY PADMAJA PATEL, OF MIDLAND, TEXAS



Introduction

IN THE MID 1960S, INDIAN PROFESSIONALS started arriving in the US in large numbers after the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which changed the basis of US immigration policy. A majority of these Indian immigrants grew up in the tradition of Sanatana Dharma, commonly called the Hindu religion. As they settled in a newly adopted country and their children grew up in the non-Hindu-majority American society, they perceived a great need to preserve and propagate their own Hindu identity to the next generation. Many Hindu temples were built, and *purohitas* (priests) trained in India were brought in to properly observe temple traditions. As of 2010, there were approximately 600+ Hindu temples and institutions in North America. The Indian *purohitas* came well trained in performing the daily temple rituals, as well as conducting the *samskaras* for the devotees, such as *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony) and *vivaha* (wedding). *Purohitas* generally do not deliver a sermon to a congregation, as in the traditions of some other religions.

As Hindu young adults in North America reached the age when marriages are usually performed, it was natural for them and their parents to wish for a proper Hindu wedding ceremony. Even in Hindu/non-Hindu unions, the desire for a Hindu ceremony is strong on the part of Hindu parents, as well as second-generation Hindu young



men and women in North America. Although a number of books are available on the topic of Hindu wedding social customs, we felt a need for a book in English specifically geared toward meeting the multifaceted requirements of the diaspora, as well as Hindus in India who follow the "Don't ask, don't tell, just do!" practice when it comes to performing symbolically rich rituals.

Differing social customs are followed in a *vivaha samskara* depending on the region (within India) of family origin. This first edition of the book does not list or delve into the region-specific practices and rituals associated with Hindu weddings. Our intention is to focus on the Vedic roots of the essential steps in a *vivaha samskara* and to sustain a common Hindu identity. Although *Vivaha Samskara*

is a result of the needs of North American Hindus, it is intended for all Hindus anywhere in the world. Our key objectives are as follows.

Educating Young Hindus

The Hindu wedding ceremony comes to us from the *Rig Veda*, the most sacred book of the Hindus. It is written in the archaic version of what eventually became the Indian classical language Sanskrit (Saṁskṛta). One of the important duties of the *purohita* is to ensure that the couple getting married understands the steps in the

Living traditions: (left) The bride's sacred wedding necklace and other jewelry are laid out for blessing on a tray adorned with betel leaves, areca nuts, unbroken rice and flowers. (above) A newly married couple confidently ponder their future as husband and wife. To this day, Hindu couples strive to preserve the traditional wedding ceremony, which has its roots in the Rig Veda. (below) Core members of the team that produced the book, *Vivaha Samskara*. (clockwise from middle) Nana Datar, Arun Jatkar, Deepak Kotwal (gold kurta), Dilip Amin, and supporter Dileep Thatte.

ceremony. Most people have not studied the Sanskrit language, making it difficult for the couple to follow the ceremony. The English-language skills of the *purohitas* from India at present may not be adequate to explain the symbolism of the rituals to couples whose mother tongue is essentially English. This will change over time. The foremost purpose of this book is to educate and empower Hindu young adults entering the married stage of life. The couple should be aware of the meaning of the *samskaras* and the sublime ideals enshrined in them.

A Guide for Bride, Groom and Parents in the Diaspora

The generation of Hindus who immigrated to North America in the 1960s and 1970s generally had their own weddings performed in the traditional Hindu Vedic way, in India in most cases. It is not a

common practice for *purohitas* in India to explain the symbolism of the steps to the couple or the attendees. Second-generation Hindus in North America are curious about their roots and heritage, but they may not get enough information from their own elders. Therefore, the second purpose of the book is to provide a reference source to the bride, the groom and their parents as they prepare for their wedding.

Vedic Hindu Vivaha Procedural Adaptation

Hindu Dharma rituals have evolved over several millennia. The third purpose of this book is to provide a Vedic Hindu *vivaha vidhi* (marriage procedure) with a few adaptations to reflect contemporary reality. The young generation of North American Hindus have generally been born and brought up in North America. Their identification with the region of family origin in India is much weaker than that of their parents, who are mostly first-generation immigrants. Therefore, this book promotes a common Hindu identity regardless of the family's regional origin.

The traditional Vedic Brahma *Vivaha* ceremony does not include a step wherein the bride and the groom state their acceptance of each other as life partners. It is presumed to have been done. The reality in the life of 21st-century Hindus in North America is that the bride and groom themselves may choose each other, with their parents' consent or with relatively minimal parental involvement. We have added a mutual-consent step to the traditional ceremony.





The joining of two families: The bride's family gathers to welcome the groom, as her mother places a dot of kumkum on his forehead



A day of joy: A bride is escorted to the wedding mandapa by her sisters, who hold up a ceremonial canopy

In the traditional Vedic *sapta-pada* (rite of seven steps), the groom expresses the couple's wishes for their married life. This book provides an alternative set of verses for *sapta-pada* wherein the bride and groom express their shared prayers and aspirations.

An English Reference for Purohitas

The Indian-trained purohitas bring thousands of years of Hindu ritual practices to the ceremony. They rightfully follow the shastras and traditions they learned. Their contribution to the sustenance of Hindu Dharma and to the creation of North American Hindus' unique identity is enormous. The ancestral lineage of the purohita, the tradition he belongs to and the region he comes from all impact the way he conducts the *vivaha samskara*. It is not the intention of this book to suggest any alterations in the practices of the properly trained purohita. As they gain experience in conducting weddings in North America, they may adapt to contemporary situations. This book is intended to assist purohitas in their meetings and communications with the couple and their parents.

Although the large cities of North America now have established Hindu temples with trained purohitas, there are many small towns where a properly qualified purohita may not be available to perform the wedding ceremony. Using this book, a practicing Hindu with fundamental knowledge of Hindu dharma, a strong desire to sustain it, familiarity with our ritual practices, sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit and the ability to properly pronounce Sanskrit words should be able to conduct the ceremony. The acting purohita is encouraged to ask the couple and their elders to read this book prior to the meetings in which they will decide the details of their ceremony.

In a Hindu wedding ceremony, the attendees have two important roles: they are observant eyewitnesses to the bride's and groom's commitments to each other and the couple's commitment to society, and they bless the couple to sanctify the union.

Hindu/non-Hindu Interfaith Marriages

As the 21st century dawns in North America, it is not uncommon for a young Hindu adult to choose a non-Hindu spouse. Such interfaith couples face many divisive issues related to the differences in their religious beliefs, especially if the non-Hindu religion is essentially exclusivist in its central tenet. The fifth purpose of the book is to ensure that a Hindu contemplating marrying a non-Hindu addresses potential differences prior to getting married so that these issues do not become festering conflicts with negative effects on harmonious marital relationship.

Contents of the Book

- A complete Vedic Hindu Brahma *vivaha* liturgy in Sanskrit with English transliteration and translation. It constitutes a step-by-step guide to each aspect of the wedding.
 - Two modifications for contemporary relevance: mutual consent and joint seven-step pronouncements.
 - Explanation of the meaning of Hindu rituals.
 - A discussion of Hindu/non-Hindu interfaith marriage issues.
 - A complete ceremony for a non-Hindu to become a Hindu.
- 161 pages, 6"x9", paperback, ISBN 978-0-9793501-3-9, \$12
To purchase the book, visit: www.hindu-wedding.org
HMEC is an initiative of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).

Steps of the Vivaha Samskara

Here we excerpt the detailed wedding procedures found in *Vivaha Samskara*. The book includes more complete explanations and instructions and provides all the mantras in Sanskrit which our summary gives in English.

Start of the Ceremony

After an invocation prayer, the purohita makes an opening statement to briefly explain the ceremony and the attendees' role therein. The bride's elders arrive at the *mandapa* (a pavilion with four pillars and a cloth canopy) and wait for the arrival of the groom's party. Although weddings generally take place in a public facility nowadays, such as a hotel ballroom, it is deemed to take place at the bride's elders' home. Therefore, they arrive first to be the hosts of the event. The groom's elders then arrive and are welcomed by the bride's elders. The two families stand together to await the groom.

Arrival of the Groom

The groom arrives to the accompaniment of music and is formally welcomed by the bride's elders. A part of the welcoming ritual involves a puja to the groom, with offerings of a seat, water for washing feet and a mixture of honey and yogurt. The

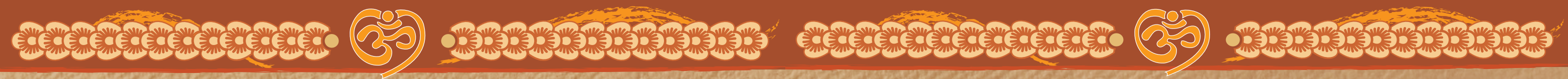
groom is then escorted to his seat on the right side (attendees' perspective) of the stage. Traditionally, the arrival of the groom and his party to the bride's village took place at least one day prior to the wedding. Such an arrival with fanfare was a method of announcing that the wedding is scheduled to take place. Anyone with an objection to the union was expected to contact the elders of the bride or groom. Gifts may be presented to the groom at this time.

Arrival of the Bride

The bride arrives, accompanied by music and fanfare. She takes her seat on the stage on the left side. It is customary in most parts of India for the maternal uncle to escort the bride to the wedding venue. Nowadays it is recommended that the bride choose as her escort(s) the elder(s) emotionally closest to her; parents in most cases. The groom's elders perform a puja to the bride. Gifts may be presented to her at this time.

Invocation to Lord Ganesha

At the beginning of any Hindu religious ceremony, Lord Ganesha's blessings are sought, as He is the remover of all obstacles. This puja is performed by both sets of elders. In this step the



VIDYA PATEL



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Meaningful rites: (far left) At the beginning of the ceremony, a statement of intent is made and the blessings of Lord Ganesha are sought. (left) In the rite of *kanya danam*, the bride's mother pours water into her husband's hand, which flows into the groom's hands and then into the bride's. (above) The father places his daughter's hand into the groom's hand. These two acts symbolize the transference of her care and protection to the groom.

bride's elders and the groom's elders request the attendees to collectively express the desire that the day and time be meritorious and auspicious for the *samskara*.

A statement of intent (*sankalpa*) is made by the elders and the couple that they are about to perform a wedding ceremony. It is customary to identify the day (according to the Hindu calendar system), names of the persons performing the ceremony, the lineages of the bride and groom and the location where the ceremony is being held.



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The announcement of the *gotra* (clan-lineage) is particularly noteworthy. In Hindu Dharma, "sagotra vivaha," i.e., the bride and groom belonging to the same *gotra*, is forbidden. The announcement of both *gotras* informs the attendees that the bride and groom belong to different *gotras*.

Tying String Around Wrists

The bride and groom each tie a cord around the other's wrist symbolizing their commitment to perform the ceremony, their pledge to provide mutual protection and their prayers for good health.

Pledge of Mutual Consent

This ceremonial step allows the couple to announce their mutual consent. Each one states that she/he has made a mature and wise decision to accept the other as spouse to discharge the duties of the householder stage of life. This step is not a part of the traditional *Brahma vivaha*. It was added in this book to reflect the contemporary reality for many North American Hindu young adults that the bride and groom choose each other as life partners.

.....
Bonds of fidelity: Each ties a cord around the wrist of the other, symbolizing mutual protection and prayers for good health

A pebble soaked in water, a *niranjana*, a tulasi leaf, darbha grass, flowers and *akshata* (unbroken grains of rice, colored) should be placed in a copper tray. The groom and the bride hold this tray in their hands and say the following three times in the presence of all the attendees.

Groom: "My fair lady, I have chosen you as my wife in the same way that Shantanu chose Ganga or Yayati chose Sharmishta. May the sages, the sacred fire, God Varuna and all other Deities, the Sun, the Moon and the Earth give their consent to our union, and may they bless our union."

Bride: "I have reached the age of majority, and I am perfectly capable of making decisions about my career and life. I thoughtfully and joyfully choose you as my husband of my own free will. May the sages, the sacred fire, God Varuna and all other Deities, the Sun, the Moon and the Earth give their consent to our union, and may they bless our union."

Now the bride asks the groom three times to take an oath, and the groom takes that oath three times. Bride: "Promise me that you will not transgress my bounds while you pursue religious duties, acquire wealth and seek the fulfillment of earthly desires!"

Groom: "In the pursuit of my religious duties, acquisition of wealth and fulfillment of earthly desires I shall not transgress your bounds."

Giving Away the Bride, *Kanya Danam*

In this step, the bride's mother pours a small stream of holy water from the *kalasha* (water vessel) onto the bride's father's palm, which then flows to the groom's palm and finally to the bride's palm. This water stream is collected by the groom's mother in a copper plate. The symbolism here is that the bride is being entrusted to the groom and that he is now responsible for her protection, with full approval of the parents of the groom and the bride.

The groom's response to the bride's parents after accepting her as his life partner is poetic and noteworthy. He raises a rhetorical question, "Who is the giver and who is the receiver?" He then goes on to provide the answer (paraphrase): "You and I are merely instruments in the hands of Ishvara. It was the wish of Ishvara that brought us together. I accept her with love, just as the parched earth at the end of summer eagerly accepts the first showers of monsoon."

One important part of this step is the advice given to the groom by the bride's father: "Do not transgress her as you pursue your duties, acquire wealth and seek fulfillment of your earthly desires." The groom repeats three times that he will not do that.

The act of gifting one's daughter represents the fulfillment of the parents' obligation or debt to their ancestors. The



Commitments deepen: (clockwise from left) 1) A curtain held between groom and bride represents their separateness before marriage; 2) the groom adorns his bride with a mangala sutra; 3) they shower one another with unbroken rice; 4) he applies kumkum to the part in her hair.

perpetuation of society through progeny is considered one of the most important duties of a householder. This act of entrusting the daughter to her husband is done for the sustenance of society through procreation.

Eight Auspicious Verses

The bride and groom stand [or sit] facing each other, each holding a fresh flower garland. A cloth curtain is held between them so that they cannot see each other's faces. The curtain symbolizes their separate identities prior to getting married.

Eight auspicious verses (*mangalashatakam*) are sung by the purohita and/or family members to invoke blessings of God, rivers, etc. At the end of each verse, the purohita and invited guests collectively advise the couple "Shubha mangalam. Svadhana." "Svadhana" means attention, and "shubha mangalam" means auspicious. The invited guests are advising the couple to pay keen attention to the commitments they are making to each other and to society on this auspicious occasion. Out of the eight verses traditionally recited, some may be specifically composed for the couple incorporating their names in the lyrics. Some are recited by relatives, such as aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins. Once the curtain is removed, the bride garlands

the groom, then the groom garlands the bride. The removal of the curtain symbolizes that two lives are becoming one and there will be no secrets between them. This is one of the most important commitments the bride and groom make to each other.

Expectations for Married Life

As the bride and groom stand or sit facing each other, they express their wishes for life. One expresses a wish and the other responds by saying, "Let it be so; I will do all I can to make it so." The bride and groom alternate. Each time, after the promise is made, one sprinkles *akshata* over the other's head. The bride and groom are committing to work together in their married life to fulfill their duties in the following six areas: prosperity, religious duties, fame, duties towards the society, to children, and success in all endeavors.

Tying the Sacred Necklace

The bride's mother presents the bride's necklace, called *mangala sutra*, literally "auspicious thread." It is sanctified by the purohita through a brief puja. The groom then places it on the bride, while reciting, "I place this mangala sutra around

your neck as a symbol of our good fortune, love and friendship." Nowadays most (not all) Hindus use a gold necklace with black and gold beads. Socially it serves as a symbol of a Hindu woman's married status.

Applying Kumkum to the Bride's Forehead

The groom then applies a red dot on the bride's forehead and red kumkum powder in the part of her hair as a symbol of his commitment to protect her in all circumstances. These are well known symbols of her marriage status. While applying the kumkum, he recites this mantra: "May this tilaka of sindura forever nourish your status and esteem, just as the orb of the early morning sun enhances the beauty and glory of the Eastern skies."

Placing a Ring on the Groom's Finger

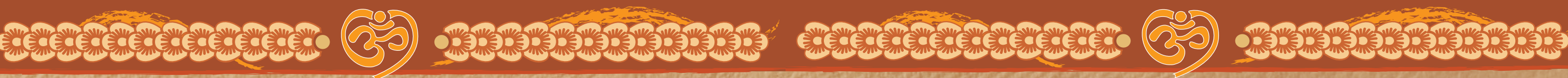
This is a Western custom adopted by Hindus in North America and elsewhere. It is not an essential part of the traditional ceremony. Bride: "I place this ring on your finger as a symbol of our love. Keep it safe and secure on your finger, and keep me safe and secure in your heart."

Tying the Knot

The purohita now instructs and guides the groom and the bride in performance of a Ganesha puja in which five betel nuts, dried roots of turmeric and some laddus are placed before the Deity. The purohita recites: "Lord Sri Ganesha, your physical stature is large. You shine with the brilliance of millions of Suns. Ignorant people do not know your real nature. Kindly remove all the obstacles in my undertakings." After the puja, the groom's stole and the end of the bride's sari are tied together, with the sanctified betel nuts inside the knot. The knot is not to be undone until the ceremony is over. The image of the bride and groom circumambulating Agni (fire), thus tied together, is iconic for Hindu weddings, representing a bond for life.

Acceptance of Hand in Marriage

The groom accepts the bride's hand in marriage while saying, "The Deities Bhaga, Aryama, Savitri and Indra have brought you to me so that we may together follow the difficult path of grihastha ashrama. I take your hand in my hand so we may receive good fortune. May we live together well into ripe old age" (*Rig Veda* 10.85.36).



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Joined by fire: (clockwise from above) 1) The joining of the hands bound with twine symbolizes the bonding of two souls, now one in body, mind, and spirit. 2) The groom and bride perform their first homa to seek Agni's blessings. 3) The bride offers puffed grains into the fire, praying for a strong, harmonious relationship with her husband's family. 4) Together they walk around the fire three times. 5) At the end of each round, the bride places her foot on a stone, symbolizing her strength to overcome all challenges. 6) During the seven-step ceremony, bride and groom together touch seven mounds of unbroken rice with their toe while reciting seven prayers.



Seeking Agni's Blessing through Homa

In Vedic times it was customary to perform an Agni puja (sacred fire worship, also called *homa*) every day. The couple's performing this ritual for the first time after getting married signifies their entry into grihastha ashrama (the householder stage of life). The groom recites, "Having accepted this bride as my wife, I will perform this vivaha homa in order to successfully and firmly establish her status as the wife and to establish the sacred fire in our household." The bride sits on the left side of the groom and rests her right hand on the groom's wrist as an indication of her participation in this vivaha homa.

The groom recites a series of Vedic mantras. Each time "svaha" is uttered at a verse's end, he pours a spoonful of ghee into the sacred fire, which burns in the homa-kunda (a small square pit holding the ritual fire, fueled by small pieces of dried wood). The couple is seeking Agni's blessings for protection, purity, illumination of minds and a smooth relationship.

Circumambulating the Fire & Ascending the Stone

The groom places two fistfuls of popped grain and two spoonfuls of ghee in the bride's hands. Then he places one hand beneath and one hand over the bride's hands. The groom recites: "Aum! By making the offerings to Agni, this girl has worshiped God Aryama. May Aryama free this girl from attachment to her parents' home and family, and not from an attachment to

our home and our family. Svaha!" The bride and the groom then together offer the grain into the fire.

The bride and groom now walk clockwise around the sacred fire holding a pitcher of holy water and homa utensils. The groom holds the bride's right hand and walks slightly ahead of her. At the end of the circumambulation she places her foot on a stone, and the groom expresses his wish that she become as strong as the stone she is standing on to form a strong household and face any adversity that may lie ahead in life.

These actions (offering puffed grains, walking around the fire and standing on the rock) are repeated two more times. In the first round, the Vedic Deity Aryama is invoked in the form of Agni. In the second round, Varuna is invoked, and in the third, Pushana is worshiped. During each round, the groom recites this verse from the *Grihya Sutras*: "I am indeed the Prana. You are also the Prana. I am the Sky, and you are the Earth. I am a verse of *Sama Veda*, and you are a verse of *Rig Veda*. Let us be married. Let us have children. Let us endear ourselves to each other. With love and affection for each other, and with minds acting in unison, let us live a long and happy life of 100 years." Finally, a fourth oblation is made to Prajapati, without circumambulating.

The Rite of Seven Steps

The purohita prepares seven small mounds of rice in a line

for the bride and groom to step on. The bride and groom, standing next to each other, their stoles still tied in a knot, step on the mounds as instructed by the purohita.

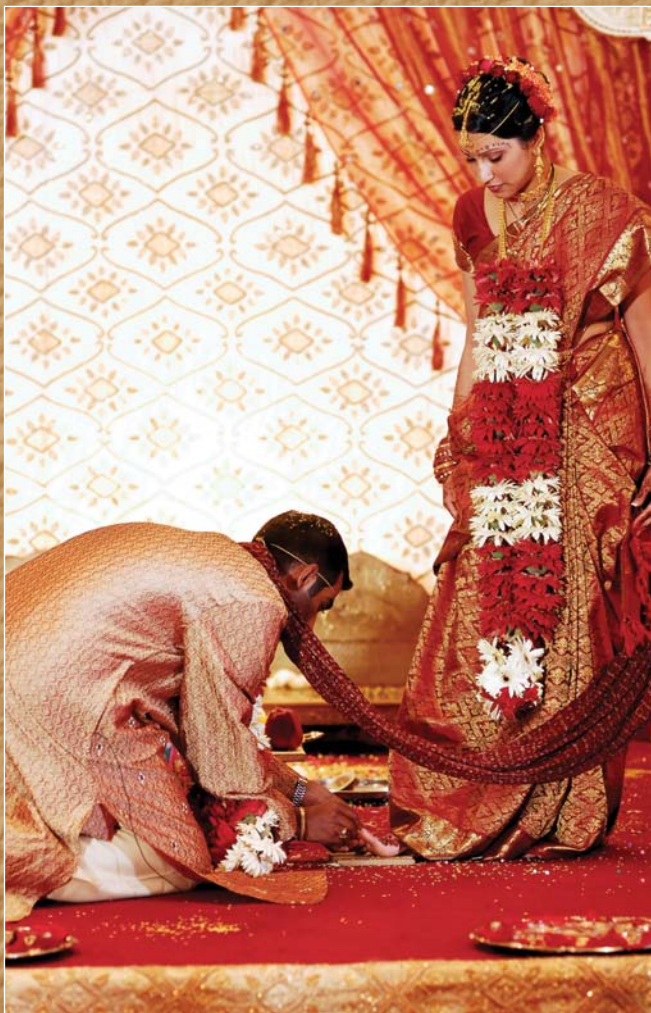
This is one of the most important parts of the ceremony. According to the 1956 Hindu Marriage Act of India, the circumambulations around Agni and the seven-step ceremony are recognized as the essence of a Hindu wedding. The sentiments expressed here provide the essence of the wife's role in the marriage. In the traditional Brahma vivaha, the groom addresses the bride and expresses seven wishes for their married life. After each statement he repeats, "Become one with me in thought and action. May we be blessed with many children and may they enjoy a long life."

1. Take this first step for the abundance of nourishment in life.
2. Take this second step for strength in life.
3. Take this third step for prosperity in life.
4. Take this fourth step for the fulfillment of all earthly desires.
5. Take this fifth step for procreation.
6. Take this sixth step for the enjoyment of the various seasons of life.
7. Take this seventh step for a lifelong friendship.





The Auspicious Day: (left) With foreheads touching, the couple receive blessings from the purohita. (above) Bowing down and touching the feet of the parents in respect; (right) receiving salutations from family and friends. (below) In the Tamil and Telugu traditions, the groom places a ring on the bride's toe just before she touches the stone after walking around the fire the first time.



Groom: "Now that we have taken these seven steps together, we will be inseparable friends through the journey of life. May Ishvara give us life long enough to watch our many children and grandchildren grow and prosper."

Rite of Seven Steps, Alternative Form with Joint Recitation

In the traditional rite of seven steps, the bride does not have the opportunity to express her wishes. In order to emphasize the complementary nature of the husband-wife relationship, *Viva-ha Samskara* provides verses to be jointly recited. These joint expressions, stated after an opening verse expressing a wish for everlasting love, make the rite of seven steps contemporary.

Bride and groom together: "O Vaishvanara Agni, we are taking seven steps together to begin our united journey of life. May our love and affection for each other keep growing the way a river keeps swelling in the rainy season." Then they together recite the following seven prayers. Prior to the first prayer, the groom says, "O Mistress of my heart! This is my first step with you." And the bride says, "O Lord of my heart! This is my first step with you." Together: "May we fulfill our duties with honor and become worthy of merit." The groom and bride exchange similar complimentary verses before each step.



1. May we fulfill our duties with honor and become worthy of merit.
2. May our home always be filled with wealth and sustenance.
3. May we know all the joys that life has to offer.
4. May our home be blessed with children and grandchildren.
5. May our life together be peaceful & mutually nourishing.
6. May our deeds bring pride to our families.
7. May our two hearts beat as one.

After the final step, the groom and bride repeat together: "Since we have taken these ceremonial seven steps together, our minds have become one. May we shine like the moon and the moonlight."

Blessings by the Purohita

Now the bride and groom stand facing each other, holding each other's hands and their foreheads touching. The purohita sprinkles holy water on them and intones the following: "May you be blessed with prosperity, power, health, plenty of food, cattle, many children and a long life of 100 years. Let there be peace. Let there be nourishment. Let there be happiness."

Meditating on Dhruva, Arundhati & Saptarishi

In this part of the ceremony, the groom and bride recite together with eyes closed: "We hold Dhruva [the pole star], Arundhati and Saptarishi [two constellations] dear to our heart. We bow down to them and pray to receive their blessings. They are the ideals of steadfastness and fidelity to all people on this Earth."

Final Salutations

The newly married couple should now bow down to their parents, the purohita and all the elders in attendance and together ask for their blessings in these words: "Respected elders, parents and gurus, kindly accept the salutations from us, the newly married couple. You all attended this samskara out of your love and affection for us. We are eternally grateful to you for that. We pray to you to once again extend your best wishes to us."

The purohita recites a verse of blessing, and all the attendees follow him in unison: "May all be well with you. As long as the sacred river Jahnavi (Ganga) flows on this Earth, and as long as the Sun, protector of all beings, shines in the sky, may you live happily with your daughters, sons and grandchildren. And may your life be filled with beauty, grace and happiness. May all be well."



The Auspicious Day: (above) An opulent outdoor wedding venue, lavishly adorned; (right) an interfaith couple exchange garlands during their Hindu marriage ceremony



Essential Steps in the Hindu Wedding Rites

The Vivaha ceremony originates in the *Rig Veda*. Varying social customs have been added to the classic Vedic ceremony in different regions of India over the centuries. In spite of the regional differences, certain elements have remarkably remained common through several millennia, in spite of the difficulty of travel and communication in the olden days, in spite of the invasions by Muslim Turks, Mongols and Arabs and occupation by Christian Europeans. Seven steps from the *Vedas* form the core of today's traditional rites:

- **Homah:** Oblation (offering) to Agni
- **Paṇigrahaṇam:** Acceptance of hand in marriage
- **Lāja-homah:** Offering of puffed grain into the fire
- **Agni-pradakshinā:** Circumambulation of the homa
- **Āsmārohaṇam:** Bride's stepping on a stone
- **Sapta-padiḥ:** Rite of seven steps
- **Dhruva-Arundhati-Saptarshi Darśanam:** Reflecting on stars and constellations

Two steps are traditionally added to the Vedic steps:

- **Śrī Gaṇeśa Pūjā:** Worship of the Lord of Obstacles, performed at the start of the ceremony
- **Kanya-dānam:** The bride's parents' giving her to the groom

The book *Vivaha Saṃskara* provides two contemporary innovations:

- **Paraspara-saṃmatiḥ:** Statement of mutual consent
- **Modified Sapta-padiḥ:** Rite of seven steps in which the bride voices her prayers along with the groom

Weddings Logistics

FROM CHAPTER FIVE OF *VIVAHA SAMSKARA*

A WEDDING IN A HINDU FAMILY IS ONE OF THE MOST JOYOUS events and is celebrated with gusto. Parents are generally deeply involved in organizing and paying for the event, because traditionally it has been the parents' responsibility to conduct a proper wedding. It can be a multi-day, lavish event with guests normally ranging between 200 and 500. The events may include:

- **Mehendi/Sangita/Garba:** Also known as the "henna and music" party. Although Garba folk dances originated in Gujarat, they have become common among many non-Gujarati communities as well.
- **Pre-Wedding Puja:** Worship to seek blessings prior to the main event. This can be a small, private, family affair. The brides from some communities perform a rite called Gauri-Hara puja just prior to the beginning of the main ceremony. A trained purohita can provide guidance in these matters.
- **Wedding Ceremony:** The main ceremony.
- **Reception:** Besides dinner and dancing, an entertainment program is generally presented by amateur artists who are friends and family.

Elders: Apart from the bride and groom, the most common parties involved in the ceremony will be the parents of the couple. It

is possible that one or both of the parents may not participate due to a variety of reasons, such as physical inability, death of one/both parents or unwillingness to participate. In such situations, the bride/groom should select someone she/he is emotionally close to, such as an uncle/aunt. The term *elders* is used generically in *Vivaha Samskara*. The purohita should customize the steps accordingly.

Expenses: Some communities have the tradition of the bride's parents bearing all the wedding related expenses. These days it is more customary for the two sides to contribute equitably. In an interfaith marriage, the issue of expense sharing may be more complicated. It is recommended that open discussions be held early on to resolve these issues.

Muhurta: The auspicious day and time chosen for the wedding is called *muhurta*. It is traditionally chosen by consulting the purohita and in accordance with the Hindu panchanga (calendar). Many times there could be a clash between practical considerations, such as availability of a venue, and the dates considered auspicious.

Venue Choice: Unlike Christian churches, Hindu temples will generally not conduct a wedding ceremony in the main temple itself. An adjacent hall may be used. Most popular choices for Hindu weddings are wedding halls or hotel ballroom facilities. Sometimes an outdoor wedding is desired. Weather plays a major role in the success or chaos of an outdoor wedding. An indoor ceremony is always

easier to manage. A Hindu wedding does require the use of a ceremonial fire. As the hospitality industry in the diaspora gets more exposed to the use of a small ritual fire in Hindu weddings, it is becoming more common that the facility management will allow the use of fire. It is essential to check on this prior to engaging the facility.

Ceremony Format: The wedding ceremony is what makes the event special. The rest of the celebration is a party! So, all steps that will be included should be decided early on, especially if it is going to be an interfaith wedding. Sometimes additional social customs are woven into the procedures. It is important that the purohita knows about these steps and how to incorporate them along with the Vedic steps.

Stage and Mandapa: The canopy under which the ceremony is performed, called *mandapa*, should have four pillars, according to the shastras. The mandapa should be at least 12 feet square and set on a stage which is at least 18 inches off the ground. The minimum recommended size of the stage is 24 feet wide and 12 feet deep. Ideally the mandapa should face east. Invited guests should be seated in two sections with an aisle clear in the middle for the arrival and departure of the bride, groom and their families. The stage should be covered in white cloth to create a pure, clean and auspicious space. All participants stepping on to the stage are required to remove footwear.

Audio-Video Recording: The photographers and videographers should not unduly interfere in the proceedings. Care should be taken to instruct them well, especially if they are not familiar with the Hindu wedding steps. The attending guests should have a clear view

of proceedings. Sometimes this is achieved by having a live video display on a large screen.

Music: During the ceremony, the presentation of appropriate music creates a serene atmosphere. The sound-system control person should coordinate the presentation of music with the purohita. Shehnai music is traditionally associated with Hindu weddings. There are many variations in the choice of music, depending on the region of India the families hail from. It is not uncommon to have live musicians perform.

Dress Code: The bride and groom's region of origin in India will greatly influence the style and color of attire. The purohita should wear simple attire worn by purohitas in India, such as a white dhoti and white/beige silk kurta. In the case of an interfaith wedding, non-Hindu participants may require assistance in selecting and wearing Indian attire.

Review of Logistics: Besides the bride and groom, there are many individuals involved in a Hindu wedding ceremony, e.g., parents, siblings, uncles and aunties. Each must be informed and understand their role in the ceremony and be ready to perform it when required. This is not the same as a rehearsal in a Christian wedding. The purohita does not rehearse the ceremony prior to the actual wedding.

Extra care should be taken in case of fusion weddings, as the non-Hindus involved may not be able to follow the purohita's instructions well. Another important item to attend to is the collection of all required materials for the ceremony. The purohita, in the initial meeting, should supply a list of items required. Most wedding materials are now available in the West.

Shaped by Volcanos and Fiery Invasions

The thrilling history and active geographic features that shaped the island of Bali

IT LOOKS A LOT LIKE THE DESCRIPTIONS OF Elysian lands where the Gods dwell. If you ask the Balinese, they will say that heaven is identical to their island—just, perhaps, a smidgen better.

Bali is surrounded by coral reefs and colorful fish in calm waters. It lies 3.2 km (2 mi) east of Java and approximately 8 degrees south of the equator. East to west, the island is about 153 km (95 mi) wide and spans approximately 112 km (69 mi) north to south; its land area is 5,632 km².

Volcanos stand tall on Bali island, active harbingers of both life and occasional doom. Bali's volcanic nature has contributed to its exceptional fertility; and its tall mountain ranges provide abundant rainfall that supports the highly productive agriculture sector—although tourism is the main economic activity.

The highest volcano is Mount Agung (3,142 m), known as "mother mountain." Agung is popular with mountain climbers; there are two major routes up, with breathtaking views. An active stratovolcano, it has had major eruptions in the recent past. Another important volcano is Mount Batur, located at the center of two concentric calderas northwest of Mount Agung. In the outer caldera, formed 28,000 years ago in a massive explosion, lies Lake Batur with stunning biodiversity. It is famous for being a great source of fish.

South of the mountains is a broad, steadily descending area where most of Bali's sprawling rice crop is grown. The northern side of the mountain, which slopes more steeply to the sea, is the main coffee producing area, along with rice, vegetables and cattle.

Beaches in the South tend to have white sand while those in the North and West have black sand. Bali has no major waterways, although the Ho River is navigable by small sampan boats. The largest city is the provincial capital, Denpasar, near the southern coast. Its population nears half a million people. Bali's second largest city is the old colonial capital, Singaraja, which is located on the north coast and is home to around 100,000 people. The island has 3,891,000 residents and is 92% Hindu.

Refuge of a Lost Kingdom

Bali's modern history began when a Javanese king defied the grandson of Genghis Khan. This was in 1290, when King Kertanegara

ruled over a mighty kingdom, and the Mongols lived too far away to be considered a real threat.

The Khan did not take the insult kindly. Enraged, he sent a massive expedition of 1,000 warships to Java. Mobilization and travel were slow in those days; the expedition arrived only three years later. By that time, the offending king had been assassinated by a usurper and the former royal family was in exile. The vast armada was left pondering what to do. Ever helpful, the son-in-law of the ousted King Kertanegara, Raden Wijaya, offered to host the invaders and guide them to victory over the new king. It was an offer hard to refuse; after all, the avenging army knew little about life in the tropics—so different from Mongolia—and Java in particular.

Raden Wijaya helped the Khan's fleet crush the usurper in 1293. Almost immediately, he launched a surprise attack on his allies. The operation had been timed to perfection: unable to miss the last days of monsoon winds which could take them home, the Mongols had no choice but to flee in confusion. They never returned.

Ambitious and able, Raden Wijaya became the first sovereign of the Hindu Majapahit Empire, which eventually expanded to encompass all the surrounding islands. In 1329, a brilliant strategist called Gajah Mada became the *mahapatih*, or prime minister, to the royal family. For 35 years, he led a golden age of the Majapahit empire, consolidating a culture that would eventually survive to the present, not in the capital on Java, but on the

neighboring island of Bali.

Bali was home to the Bali Aga people, who followed a form of Mahayana Buddhism with Saivite Hindu and indigenous influences. The Balinese were closely related to the Javanese; both belonged to the Austronesian race, the indigenous people of Indonesia, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand and Hawaii. In 1343, Gajah Mada defeated the Balinese king, bringing a strong influx of Javanese culture into Bali—in religion, architecture, art, dance, theater and (with the introduction of the Kawi script) literature. Those Balinese who refused to be assimilated created small communities which survive to this day in Bali, with a population of about 3,000 and a distinct language.

Little did the Majapahit Javanese know that by creating an outpost of their civilization in Bali, they were also creating a heaven that would allow the survival of their culture.

After a brief golden age, the archipelago empire fell into dynastic conflict and civil war, weakening its ability to defend itself. Meanwhile, its expansionist ambitions made it no friends. In 1400 the Majapahit Empire used thousands of ships to conquer Parameswara, the last king of Singapore island. Parameswara fled with his court and personal guard to North Sumatra. There he created a new country, the Kingdom of Malacca.

His was a tiny nation, but Parameswara was a cunning ruler seething for revenge. Struggling to hold his position against old Majapahit enemies and several local tribes, Parameswara sent his ambassador to visit

the Emperor of China, the superpower of that period, and the two sovereigns agreed to become allies.

The Ming Dynasty ruler of China sent one of his most trusted generals to protect his new ally and take hold of that area of the Pacific. This was Admiral Zheng He, a devout Muslim, a trusted eunuch, a warlord with wide autonomy. Islam had arrived in China in the 8th century through Persia and the Himalayas, converting a small following, including the admiral's ancestors.

Eager to please his new protector, King Parameswara converted to Islam and adopted an Islamic name, Sultan Iskandar Shah. He renamed the formerly Hindu kingdom of Malacca as the Sultanate of Malacca. Under the might and influence of the new local potentates, surrounding nations and tribes quickly fell to either the Sultanate or Zheng He and his tens of thousands of soldiers.

Admiral Zheng He left a massive legacy. He is the sole reason why Islam is present in the Pacific. His personal religious choice, impressed upon several kingdoms, was never reverted. By the end of his life, China itself had changed. When the new Hongxi Emperor ascended the throne, he withdrew all expansionist policies, called back all ships and left the rest of the world to itself, initiating an isolationist policy that would last for centuries. With China absent as a cultural, military and religious influence, the only real powers in the South Asian sea were the Muslim kingdoms established by Zheng He.

Abruptly surrounded by hostile forces following an alien religion, the Majapahit fell

quickly. In despair, those who could retreat to Bali, where the mountainous geography provided strongholds that were harder to conquer. The Hindus remaining in Java, though weakened, managed to defend themselves until the Sultanate of Malacca became distracted by invasions by Portuguese mariners in the North and left them alone.

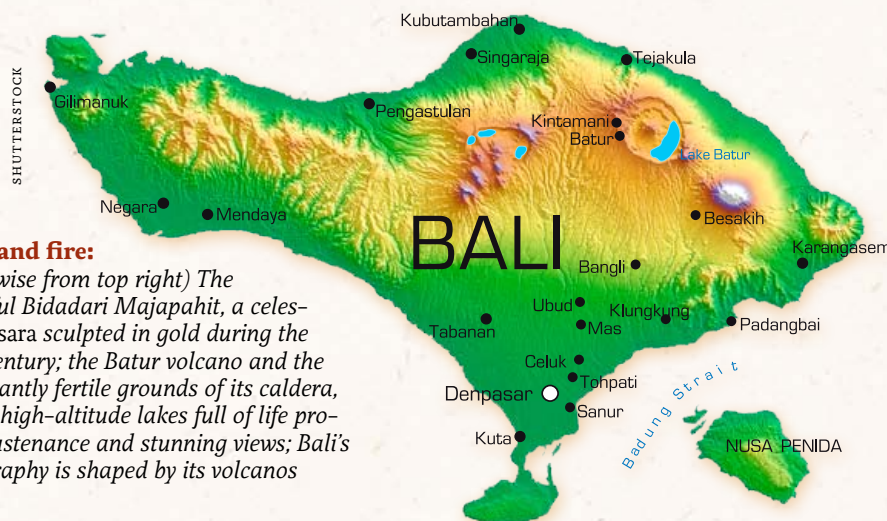
Gathering the remnants of a formerly splendid empire, the refugees slowly built a nation, found a new life and created a new identity in the island of Bali.

The Kingdom of Bali lasted for hundreds of years, its kings deftly maneuvering among the warring powers that navigated the waters of the archipelago. Occasionally it allied itself with the Dutch and French against the British and Malacca, but forbade foreign interference on the island.

In the late 19th century, however, the Balinese kings' grip on the nation began to slip. The Indonesian archipelago became the Dutch East Indies. In Bali, the Dutch used the pretext of eradicating opium smuggling, weapons traffic and slavery to impose their control on Balinese kingdoms.

In 1906, claiming as an excuse the plundering of shipwrecks, the Dutch mounted large naval and ground assaults on Bali, leading to several massacres and the elimination of the royal house. The Dutch attacks were followed closely by the media, and reports of the sanguinary conquest shocked the West. Afterwards, the Dutch governors exercised administrative control over the island, but under pressure from the outraged international community, they interfered little with religion and culture. In 1914, Bali was opened to tourism.

In the aftermath of World War II, when European colonialism lost its last claims to legitimacy, parts of the Dutch East Indies declared independence. When conceding, the Netherlands recognized all the islands under its influence as a single new nation, the Republic of the United States of Indonesia. Though this was a melange of nations with great cultural differences, such as West Borneo, Java, East Indonesia and Bali, it remains a united country to this day.



Gold and fire:

(clockwise from top right) The graceful Bidadari Majapahit, a celestial apsara sculpted in gold during the 14th century; the Batur volcano and the abundantly fertile grounds of its caldera, where high-altitude lakes full of life provide sustenance and stunning views; Bali's topography is shaped by its volcanos



Bali's Bedazzling Cultural Identity

Deftly adapting to new influences, Bali retains its graceful arts heritage

By RAJIV MALIK, BALI

CREATIVE AND UNIQUE YET TRADITIONAL, Bali's art is a reflection of its culture and its people. Temple architecture, dance costumes, paintings, everyday utensils and even food manifest an unmistakable style, with lively curves full of movement and distinctive, pointed ornaments. The Balinese are a celebratory people with high aesthetic tastes, and art in its many forms is essential to them. On this island, beauty is a sacred form of worship.

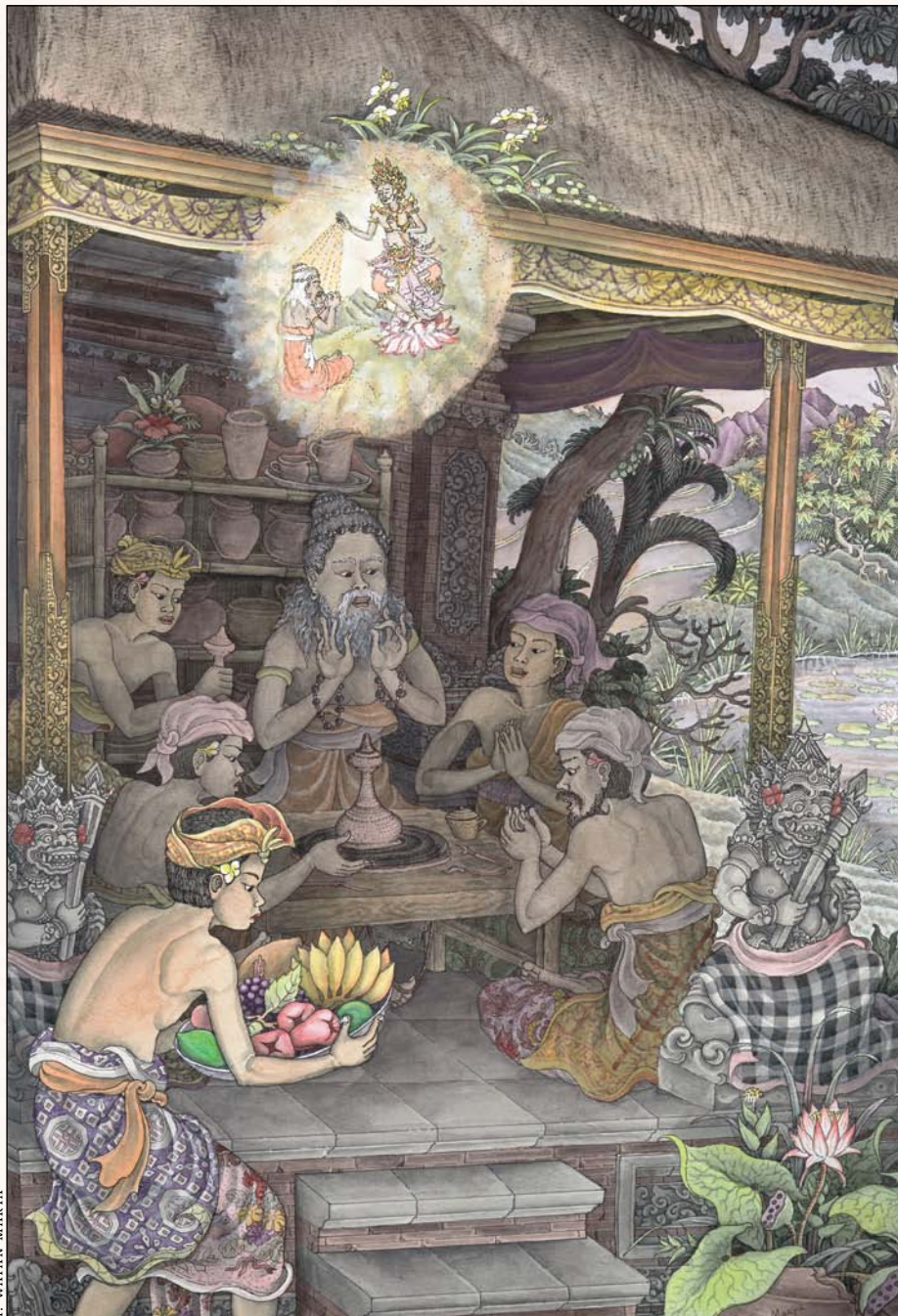
Most art in Bali is based on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—though it may not seem so to untrained eyes—and also on indigenous stories, where Barong and Rangda play a large role. It is through art, music, dance and puppets that the epic sacred stories are conveyed here, not through kathak and other spoken methods as in India. Damar Wayanag, a member of the former royal family of Ubud and a consultant in Balinese culture, explains, "Religion is the spirit of culture here in Bali."

From the 16th to the 20th century, East Bali was the center of classical Balinese art. During the early 1900s, Ubud established a reputation as the new cultural epicenter. Ubud and Batuan are known for their paintings, Mas for woodcarving, Celuk for gold and silver smiths, and Batubulan for stone carving.

A Recent Revolution in Painting

Until the 1920s, Bali's painting followed the traditional *kamasan* style, with two-dimensional drawings drawn on cloth or *ulatanga* (bark) paper. Colors were limited to available natural dyes, mostly red, ochre and black. With the arrival of many Western artists in the 1930s, Bali became an artists' enclave. Local artists experimented with new materials and colors, merging old and new with ease, but the results were still distinctively Balinese. This so-called "modern traditional Balinese painting" thrives, highly regarded, to this day. It is on display at several museums worldwide, notably at the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, the Leiden Museum, the Asian Art Museum in Fukuoka and the Singapore National Art Museum. HINDUISM TODAY so admires the style it has commissioned paintings from Bali over the years.

Ida Bagus Jembawan, 51, is a painter and art teacher in Ubud. His atelier is crowded with sketches and vibrant paintings of Hin-



du Gods and Goddesses, full of the dynamic force and mystical quality typical of Balinese art. Though the noises of roosters and the laughter of small children compete for his

attention, Jembawan, a quiet and unassuming character, remains immersed in his craft. "I feel my paintings will encourage people to worship the Gods. I do paintings and art

Bali's great festivities: (opposite page) Balinese artist I Wayan Marya's depiction of a master craftsman and his apprentices; (top to bottom) a reenactment of the *Ramayana*, Bali-style; young dancers have lots of fun learning their art; Ida Bagus Jembawan works on his next piece at home

for the temples for free," says Jembawan. "I get up at 4 in the morning to paint. I also give classes at an art school from 7 am to 2 pm; after some rest, I paint some more until 6 pm or later. If I work continuously on one painting, it takes me around one month to complete it. Life is a struggle because I have five children to raise, but I am quite contented as an artist."

His wife, Anak Agung Raka Putri, is a greatly skilled artist of another kind. She creates intricate *canangs*, the beautiful offerings taken to Gods at the temple. A *canang* is a square basket made of a coconut-palm leaf, filled with fruits, sugar cane, rice and betel nuts and topped with a wide variety of colorful flowers and shredded leaves. She told HINDUISM TODAY that even though the younger generation is enthralled by the lure of the West and fancy tech gadgets, the young girls eagerly and lovingly learn the traditional art of making offerings. In Balinese culture it is the women's duty to care for the family shrine and make sure that all the necessary materials are available for the husbands or priests to invoke the Gods. Only then will the Deities come and bless their families.

Ketut Budiana, a local master painter, creates art as a *sadhana*. "The paintings I love I do not sell at any price. These paintings are a lesson for me. For instance, there is a painting entitled 'Teertha, the Generator of Life.' Through this painting I am trying to explore how to discover the nectar of life. To create a work of art, one has to do a lot of penance. One has to do a lot of hard work." Budiana's inspirations reflect his lofty intentions. "Yoga and kundalini awakening are my favorite subjects. Through my paintings I want to promote peace in the world. I want to highlight that the environment should not be disturbed, but before that we have to learn not to be ruffled ourselves. We use the Balinese *akshar* (alphabet) which originates from the *nada* (sound) of nature. For instance, we make the paintings based on the *nada* of the waves. Nature is my guru, and you are my guru, too."

Art in Buildings and Temples

Bali's unique artistic style is quite evident in temple architecture. I Nyoman Artana, an expert in *udangi*, temple building, says, "In Bali every village already has its temples, so not many new temples are being built; but a lot of renovation work is being done. We follow the ancient rules of construction. The



entire layout of the building is done as per *ast kaushala kaushali*. I learned temple architecture from my father and other senior members of my clan." Artana sees his art as a craft so sacred he will not accept money for it; being a udangi is not his daytime job. "No udangis would do temple work for money. Usually udangis would have a business or profession to support their families. We build big temples and homes, but we sometimes have no proper home ourselves. Even if we did have money, an udangi is expected to spend it in service of the community."

Dancing Is for Everyone

The Ancak Saji Ubud Palace Court Yard, built in the 16th century, is one of the noblest stages on the island. Its dance and drama performances brim with finesse, vigorous movement and a youthful swirl of energy and color, expressing not just professional virtuosity but the dedication of a people who love their art.

"Bali is one of the few remaining places where one can still experience sacred theater and art done by common people. Someone who harvests rice all day long might change into an elaborate costume and ride his bicycle to perform on stage at night," explains Erika Batdorf, a Canadian performer who lived in Bali.

Tourism is the backbone of the economy, and the government wisely throws its weight behind the people's love for the arts. "The government is invested in our art and culture," says dancer Dr. Nyoman Catra, a professor at the Indonesian Institute of Arts. "Formal art education is available in high school. Villages also locally promote performances. In addition there are private schools, known as *sang-*

gar, which help to preserve the culture."

Dr. Catra feels confident about the future of Hinduism on the island and the endurance of their culture. "We are not afraid that Balinese art and culture will be swept out by modern Western culture. Youth can perform at the temple festivals; there are also hundreds of performances at the Bali Arts Festival held every year for one month in June/July. Young people are trained in the performing arts everywhere in Bali."

Dr. Catra believes the religious spirit and content infused in art also contributes to its endurance, even as tourism exerts a pull. "The soul of the art and culture in Bali is Hinduism. Hindu traditions are there in offerings, performance and culture. When you go to the temple, or to weddings and cremations, you always go in the traditional costumes. I perform as a dancer in temple rituals. I make intensive use of our masks during performances. Once I performed in New Delhi with multiple masks, and the audience took a deep interest. Our performances are effective and powerful because we do them as an offering to the Gods, or as part of ritual—and not just for pleasure. This is devotion.

"It's true that tourism has affected some of the local traditions. Some performances of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are held specifically for the tourists. I have been performing in these as Hanuman, and I see that the quality of performance declines; it becomes a repetitive, everyday event rather than a rare celebration. But from another angle the tourists help in maintaining the culture by paying for keeping it alive. So tourism here is a mixed blessing; it both preserves and destroys."

Dance Styles

Balinese dance follows the rhythms produced by the ever-present gamelan. In Balinese music you can also hear metallophones, gongs and xylophones, along with the *an-klung* (a bamboo rattle) and the *rebab* (a two-stringed spike fiddle). There are fewer codified dance hand positions and gestures, the mudras, in Bali and Java than in India.

Bali has several distinct styles. The popular Barong dance enacts the endless struggle of the good God Barong against the evil personified by Goddess Rangda. At the end, evil is always subdued, though never vanquished. The Legong dance is a refined form characterized by intricate finger movements, complicated footwork, and expressive gestures and facial expressions, which probably originated in the 19th century as royal entertainment. Legong dancers are always girls who have not yet reached puberty. They begin rigorous training at about the age of five. These dancers are regarded highly in the society and usually become wives of royal personages or wealthy merchants. Legend tells of a prince who fell ill and had a vivid dream in which two maidens danced to the sound of gamelan music. When he recovered, he arranged for such dances to be performed in reality. Others believe that the Legong originated with the *sanghyang dedari*, a ceremony involving voluntary possession of two little girls by beneficent spirits. In Legong, the little actresses are accompanied by a third dancer called a *tjondong* or attendant. She sets the scene, presents the dancers with their fans and later plays the part of the raven.

Most famous is probably the Kecak dance, also known as the Ramayana Monkey Chant. A circle of 150 or more performers wearing

Unmistakable style: (opposite page) the Kecak monkey dance is a cultural treasure less than a century old, but its magnetic power, featured in several film documentaries, never ceases to amaze; (right, top to bottom) the masks used in theater plays are also sacred charms, blessing homes with the benign presence of Baroda; Garuda the celestial bird in a stone carving full of movement; food preparation is an art, specially if the fare is offered as *prasadam* to the Gods

checked cloth around their waists, percussively chanting "cak" and throwing up their arms, depict a battle from the *Ramayana* where Hanuman helped Prince Rama fight the evil King Ravana. Originating in the 1930s, Kecak has roots in *sanghyang*, a trance-inducing exorcism dance. Living in Bali at the time, German painter and musician Walter Spies became deeply interested in that ritual and recreated it as a drama for tourist audiences, basing it on the Hindu *Ramayana* and including dance. An innovation was to only use voices and not the gamelan.

Also popular in both Bali and Java is the shadow puppet theater. Some puppets are crafted from hide and mounted on bamboo sticks; others are flat woodcarvings barely one-fourth inch thick. When held up between an oil lamp or electric bulb and a piece of white cloth, shadows are cast on the screen.

An Example to Be Followed

Babies born into the families of Balinese dancers learn the craft from infancy. Music rocks their cradle, and their mother teaches them to dance doing mudras with their little hands before they can walk. Official training as a dancer starts early. "My own son performed for the first time when he was five years old," says Dr. Catra.

The professional dancers of Bali earn their living from giving classes as much as they do from performing. I Wayan Karta, a 51-year-old dancer, learned the art first from his father, and later at dance and music schools. "Now I teach dancing, singing and music at school. I teach the children how to play gamelan in a private school. I also teach traditional classical dance to the foreigners. And because we are so happy to see our children taking an interest in our tradition, many colleagues and I go to villages and teach dance and music to the children for free. My wife is a stage make-up artist, and she comes with me."

HINDUISM TODAY visited a private school in Klungkung where children learn the traditional Balinese dances, paying the teacher by the hour. Some of the children were paying her out of their own pocket money. Would that children everywhere were so keen to learn and live their tradition, following the lead of the remarkable island of Bali.



ALL PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK





ALL PHOTOS: VISUALBALI.COM

SCRIPTURE

Safeguarding Bali's Sacred Palm Leaves

Bali's *lontar* bundles contain scriptures brought from India over a thousand years ago, including ancient versions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

By RAJIV MALIK, BALI

BALI'S ANCIENT LONTAR ARE IDENTICAL in concept to the palm-leaf manuscripts of India. By some estimates, 50,000 ancient lontar manuscripts are held by the priests, scholars and ordinary Hindus of Bali, passed down from their ancestors. These were the books and ledgers of their day, used for everything from the *Vedas* and *Agamas* to the epics to land records. In Bali we find lontar on religion, holy scriptures, prominent rituals, family lineages, law codes, medicine, arts, architecture, calendars, poetry, prose, black magic and even the rules for cock-fighting. Many of these palm-leaf manuscripts are kept in beautifully hand-crafted wood boxes and cleaned and worshipped yearly on Saraswati Puja.

Though many Balinese Hindus have lontar in their homes, few understand their contents. The language of most is Kawi, also known as Old Javanese; a few are in Sanskrit. Dr. Nyoman Catra, who heads the lontar digitization project at the Dwijendra Foun-

ation, explained that the texts date back as far as the 9th century ce. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were translated from Sanskrit into Kawi, a script derived from the Pallava and Grantha scripts used to write Sanskrit in South India from the 6th century ce onwards, during the era of seafaring exploration by Indian kingdoms. Some newer lontar are written in Aksara Bali, a script derived from Kawi around the 15th century. (Several old scripts of Southeast Asia are closely related, as are modern Malayalam and Sinhala.)

When the Majapahit kingdom collapsed due to the Muslims coming to Indonesia, the lontars were brought from Java to Bali and maintained there ever since. Palms grow everywhere in Java and Bali, so the leaves are readily available, Dr. Catra explained.

The Dwijendra Foundation is a government-supported institution which has 3,000 lontar and funds the ongoing digitization project headed by Dr. Catra, who also lectures on the performing arts at the Indone-

sian Institute of Arts. HINDUISM TODAY was directed to this institution by Dr. Ron Jenkins, professor of theater at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, USA. Dr. Jenkins has a long association with Bali and a particular interest in the lontar dealing with theatre production. Together he and Dr. Catra transcribed and translated *Sivaratrikalpa* (Siva's Night Meditation), a story about knowledge and enlightenment. They teamed up with the San Francisco-based Internet Archive Foundation to digitize the 3,000 lontar at Dwijendra Foundation.

The word *lontar* comes from Old Javanese *ron* meaning leaf and *tal* meaning the rontal tree (*Borassus fabellifer*, commonly called palmyra or toddy palm). The leaves are cut, dried, soaked in water, dried again, steamed, treated with herbs, then flattened and dried one last time. They are assembled into bundles of varying number of leaves, trimmed with a plane, fitted with boards top and bottom and bound together with strings



Preserving Bali's written heritage: (left to right) I. Made Titib displays a lontar handed down in his family; the lontar project is housed in the building on the left at the elegant campus of Dwijendra Foundation; Nyoman Catra (sitting) sets up a shoot; close up of the Old Javanese or Kawi script on a leaf

through two or three holes punched in the leaves. The resulting bundle is far more durable than a modern paper book and can last for hundreds of years with proper care.

According to an article at www.wonderfulbali.com, there are nine categories of lontar: 1) Weda, dealing with mantras and religious rituals; 2) Agama, religious rules, ethics, morals and law; 3) Wariga, astronomy and astrology; 4) Usada, medicine; 5) Itahasa, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and Balinese literature; 6) Babad, history and genealogy; 7) Tantri, stories from ancient Indian literature, Balinese stories and scholastic writings; 8) Le-lampahan, stories from the performing arts; and 9) Prasi, illustrated lontar derived from the wayang shadow puppet plays.

Professor I Made Titib, rector of the Denpasar State Hindu Dharma Institute, kindly displayed one of his family's treasured lontar (photo at top left). It was last copied onto new leaves in 1920. "This is the *Ramayana* in old Javanese language," he explained. "This is not Valmiki *Ramayana* but another version written by Bhatti Maharishi. I can read and recite it, but to be understood by the common man it has to be translated into the local Balinese language. Our *Ramayana* ends after Rama is victorious and takes over the kingdom of Ayodhya. Once Ravana is killed, it is the end of Indonesian *Ramayana*. Rama's sons, Luv and Kush and their story is not there." As with many Balinese I encountered, he was very interested in obtaining the fuller version of the *Ramayana* as well as other scriptures not present in Bali, such as the *Rig Veda*.

The Digitization Project

Dr. Catra works in a big hall belonging to the cultural division of the Governor of Bali. The air is filled with the strong smell of vari-

ous chemicals and traditional Balinese herbal oils being used to clean and preserve the ancient lontar. "This collection of lontars," Catra explains, "is in the possession of the government of Bali as it is a national heritage."

The lontar currently being photographed was entitled "How to Become a Rishi," giving directions on how those aspiring to be priests are to be purified. The bundle had been cleaned with alcohol and lemon grass oil. If necessary, the leaves would be rubbed again with ink made from lamp black to darken the writing, as when they were first made. Two leaves are photographed at a time, and 500 photos are taken each day—a decent pace for this kind of work. The title, size, number of leaves, camera resolution and other cataloging information is assembled with the photo files and transmitted to the Internet Archive in San Francisco where it goes on line. As of September 21, 2011, over half of the 3,000 lontars have been photographed and archived.

Relationship to Saiva Agamas

HINDUISM TODAY itself recently completed a very similar digitization project, photographing the palm-leaf collection of the French Institute of Pondicherry. That collection contains bundles on many of the same topics as found in the Bali lontar, with the addition of *Saiva Agamas*.

"The lontars are mainly based on the Siva teachings," Dr. Catra said, "but I am not aware whether they are connected to *Saiva Agamas*. We have the concept of Siva, Sadasiva and Paramasiva, but no one has come to Bali from South India to study the lontar."

That philosophical approach is very much



in line with the *Saiva Agamas*. With both collections now available online, scholars have an entirely new means to research the connection. Already we know that the Kawi script is closely related to the Grantha script of the *Agamas*, and the kingdoms which spread Hinduism to Indonesia were South Indian.

Bali's digitization project has the same motivation as in Pondicherry: preservation of the texts contained in the lontar before the leaves disintegrate through age, insects and other hazards.

The skill to prepare and scribe lontar continues to exist in Bali, unlike in South India where it has died out altogether. I was pleasantly surprised when one of the girl students took my business card and expertly scribed my name on a leaf in just few minutes. A side project being done elsewhere, Catra shared, has perfected a way to print on lontar leaves with a laser printer. He said the results are similar to the scribed leaves, and proof-reading corrections are much easier!

There are Hindus in Bali who can still read the lontar, but their number is decreasing. Even the bundles themselves are not well cared for in all households. The present project has funding only for the government collection and is expected to end in a few more months. If funds become available, Catra said, they could extend the project to include lontar in private hands.

Bali's Annual Day of Silence

A time of purification and reflection for the whole island—with no exceptions

IN BALI, THE START OF A NEW YEAR IS NOT marked by fireworks or a ten-second countdown; ritual here is much deeper and more ornate than the celebrations of the West. For the Balinese, the dawn of each new year is a time of purification, reflection and spirituality, a day when complete silence descends on the island, as if no one lived there.

The Balinese follow two different calendars, forming a system almost incomprehensible to uninitiated foreigners. In the pawukon calendar, a year lasts 210 days. The saka, a lunisolar calendar, is used to calculate Nyepi, the new year. In 2012, this falls on March 23rd.

Dr. V. Ramesh Sastry, a Vedic scholar and secretary general of the World Hindu Youth Organisation, explains, "Nyepi marks the beginning of a new lunar year. It occurs at the beginning of spring, between the last week of March and early April."

Gathering on beaches a few days before new year's day, beautifully dressed in ritual clothes, the Balinese perform a ceremony called Melasti to honor God as the owner of both land and sea. Balinese Hindus purify their bodies and souls in the presence of their Deities with ritual and pujas at seaside temples, where offerings are made. Water is blessed as amreta (amritam), a gift from Gods Baruna (Varuna) and Wisnu (Vishnu); it is used to purify other parts of the island in the days ahead, cleansing all spiritual defilement.

On the next day, known as Bhuta Yajna, the people dedicate time to getting rid of all the evil thoughts and spirits that have accumulated during the year. Vanquishing all negative elements, the aim is to create a balance between God, mankind and nature. This connection is an integral part of Balinese Hindu worship, the foremost goal of which is to uphold cosmic harmony. On Bhuta Yajna, offerings are made to appease upset spirits and ancestors. "All the bad karma accrued in the year is supposed to be removed by these rites," explains Puneet Malhotra,

an Indian who has lived in Indonesia and Bali for more than 22 years and is the general secretary of the Bali Indian Friendship Association.

For truly demonic forces, asuras and evil thoughts, the Balinese perform a ritual banishment to drive away the forces of darkness. The Balinese do all they can to instill fear in their spiritual foes. On the day before the new year's day of silence, in a ritual known as Ngerupuk, local Hindus march around their villages with bamboo torches in their hands, making as much noise as they can to scare demons away. In a recent but widely-loved tradition started in the mid 1980s, Balinese youths parade *ogoh-ogoh*, giant figurines of paper and bamboo, spectacularly decorated, scary representations of the demons, with fangs and bulging eyes. Famous local politicians are sometimes also recreated as ogres on this day, causing embarrassment to the

leaders and laughter on the streets.

Ngerupuk is a joyous carnival. Loud street parades feature the famed, traditional percussion instrument, the *gamelan*. The processions are usually managed by the Seka Teruna, the youth organization. Families merrily attend together; children are at both fascinated and scared by the event. Author Janet De Neeffe, who lives in Bali, recalls, "The boys in our street made a terrifying demon with a huge snake wrapped around him, more than three meters high. The perfect snakeskin was made from layers of thinly cut foam, then painted in shades of green and brown. The monster was red, black and white. Music blasted from its mouth (there was a transistor radio connected inside) and its eyes flashed. When seeing these monsters, small children often cry with fear, or hide behind their mother's sarong; but slightly older kids love it. My two boys were in awe of its creators." Finally, most *ogoh-ogoh* are taken to the intersections and burned to the ground, in a clear message of what will happen to any malevolent ones who dare to stay.

After that, the island falls silent. Nyepi, as that day is called, begins at 6 am on the day after Ngerupuk. Demons expelled, evil purged, the Balinese lay quiet. If any bad spirit decides to come back, the idea is that they will find the island uninhabited, not worth occupying; and, confused, the demons will leave forever.

Nyepi is a day reserved for self-reflection. Pecalang (traditional Balinese security men), wearing a black uniform and a ceremonial hat, secure the streets and stop any activities that disturb Nyepi. No vehicle or foot traffic is allowed, save for medical emergencies.

At home, no work should be done. Many fast and perform religious practices. It is a particularly good day for meditation. Fires are also proscribed. Electricity is turned off in most places and all public lighting is shut down. Stars are strikingly visible on that dark night, a spectacle that does not go unnoticed when there is no television or radio to distract—even sex

Bali's greatest festivities: (opposite page) the *ogoh-ogoh* monsters are a national favorite; youth spend much of their free time creating the figurines, often starting months ahead, in a friendly competition to make the most terrifying creature. (top right) Be orderly and harmonious seems to be embedded in Bali's DNA; these ladies, in matching clothing and style, carry offerings to temples on Melasti day. (right, middle) Balinese men walk silently on the beach, returning from a Melasti ceremony worshiping God as Lord of Sea and Land. (bottom) Colorful *gamelans* are played during the Ngerupuk parade.

is not supposed to happen on Nyepi's eve.

"When we first came here we did not know the full rules about Nyepi," shares Puneet Malhotra. "My wife was pregnant and we switched on the light for safety. Immediately people came asking us to switch off the lights."

"Nothing is happening on Nyepi," recounts Bhubneshwar Sharma, deputy director at the Indian Cultural Centre of the Embassy of India. "Even dogs stop barking. There is pin-drop silence. Everything is closed. It may seem like a wasted day, but it is really great. Something like this cannot be imagined in India. But these people have a lot of patience."

Although Nyepi is primarily a Hindu holiday, non-Hindu residents of Bali observe silence out of respect for their fellow citizens. Tourism is the lifeblood of Bali's economy. Still, on Nyepi, tourists are expected to understand and respect the tradition. While not bound by law to obey the holiday disciplines, they find the hotel staff reduced and striving to remain quiet. Visitors are free to do as they wish in their hotels, but no one is allowed on the beaches or streets, and the island's solitary airport is closed. Tourists may turn on the lights in their rooms, but their windows are often draped and curtained to keep the hotel inconspicuous. Most find the day charming rather than a nuisance; in fact, many schedule their trip to experience the peace and quiet, when one need not retreat from the bustling city to find silence. Hotels offer special package rates for the three days of new year.

The day after Nyepi, social activity picks up again. This is a time known as Ngembak Geni, when families and friends gather to ask forgiveness from one another and perform certain religious rites together. Harmony prevails. The Balinese have done their part, through sadhana and worship, in hopes that a wonderful new year has begun.



The Reality of Animal Sacrifice

This controversial practice is widely accepted in Bali, Nepal and a handful of other places. Opinions on its basis and morality differ throughout the Hindu world.

BY RAJIV MALIK, BALI

ANIMAL SACRIFICE, CALLED *BHUTA YA-jna* in Sanskrit and *caru* in Balinese, is widely accepted in Bali—much more than in India. No report on Balinese Hinduism would be complete without addressing the issue.

I did not witness this practice during my two-week stay, which included visits to many of the most prominent temples, but nearly everyone I spoke with supported it. However, priest Ida Rsi made it clear that this is not an everyday occurrence; rather, it is limited to certain occasions: "It is a special ceremony, performed only during special pujas, such as temple festivals and new year festivities. It is not a part of daily puja."

Strong Local Tradition

Indian-born Puneet Malhotra, a resident of Bali for seven years, owns the Queen's Tandoor restaurant in Kuta. He shares his experience: "Animal sacrifice is done in a big way here, close to the culture prevailing in Bengal. When we opened our restaurant, Balinese Hindu priests conducted the ceremony, which began with killing and burying a dog out in front. Then a pig was roasted, grilled, worshiped and buried. They killed fifty chickens, burying them in the various corners of the building. I had requested all of this not be done, but I was told it had to be done according to the local traditions, that animal sacrifice is an integral part of any big ceremony. We had to follow the customs; we were told that if we did not, and something untoward were to happen later on, we would be blamed for it."

In his book *Bali: Sekala and Niskala*, journalist Fred Eiseman, Jr., explains the basic philosophical premise: "In the Hindu faith, one must take the bad with the good, and while the Gods must be worshiped, the demons—in respect for their great power—must be placated. And the demons, the leering and fanged *bhutas* and *kalas*, have great and gross appetites." He describes the range in magnitude of sacrifices: "Caru range from a fairly simple offering requiring the sacrifice of a single chicken, to elaborate ceremonies

involving the slaughter of dozens of animals."

While most Indian Hindus oppose animal sacrifice (and eating meat) based on the prevailing Hindu principle of ahimsa, non-violence, only a few Balinese Hindus seem to share this view. From students to high priests, nearly everyone I interviewed endorsed animal sacrifice, believing it leads to the attainment of a human birth for the animal.

Ida Rsi disclosed, "I have a book by Romila Thapar. She is not liked in India, and people say she is wrong. But I find her to be correct. She mentions that in ancient times, Hindu kings and nobles ate beef, though only on special occasions. This practice continues in

customs: "We follow Durga and Siva, who are two sides of the same coin. We worship Durga if we want something magical. She is extremely popular in Bali, and every home worships Her every fifteen days with animal sacrifice. Every hundred years we have to perform the Ekadasa Rudra festival in which more than 200 kinds of animals are offered."

Though most people I interviewed avoided this question, I gathered that a family may typically offer between five and two dozen animals per year in various ceremonies, according to its means, to say nothing of the animals they eat without formally sacrificing them. With a population just under four million, any number must pale in comparison to the 59 billion animals killed in 2009 to feed the US's population of 312 million.

Vedic Controversy

Proponents of animal sacrifice usually cite the *Rig Veda*, the oldest of Hinduism's revealed scriptures. Certain of its verses could be interpreted to support the practice, but scholars differ: Should those words be taken literally, or do they have a deeper, mystical meaning?

Some Vedic commentators, such as Udgita, Ananda Tirtha, Atmananda and Sayana, refer to *Rig Veda* verse 10.86.14, in which Indra says, "They cook for me 15

plus 20 oxen," and verse 8.43.11, which describes Agni as one whose food is the ox and the barren cow. These verses, they say, mean that these animals should be offered in *yajnas*. Vedic-Agamic scholar and priest Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar says these verses should not be interpreted literally. He asserts that the true meaning is symbolic: "The tenth mandala of the *Rig Veda* states that the words of the *Veda* mantras are concealed words, encapsulating deeper meanings. Therefore the reader should never take the meaning literally." Hinduism is full of symbolism, perhaps more than any other religion; and Dr. Sabharathnam explains that various animals mentioned in the context of sacrifices are actually representative of our inner faculties, qualities, emotions and external and internal organs. "Killing a horse

Porcine offerings: (right) A man carries a small pig destined for a ceremony; (below) a roasted pig accompanies piles of traditional oblations collected for a large rite

refers to suppressing the human/animal side of our life-energy and transmuting it to the Divine. Similarly in all other contexts."

Pandit Vamadeva Shastri amplifies the mystical viewpoint: "The Vedic yajna has an inner side, with the offerings of speech, mind and prana, such as outlined in the fourth chapter of the *Gita*, and as reflected in many Vedic mantras. The practice of yoga itself arose from the inner sacrifice."

Along these lines, Sabharathnam offers an alternate translation for one of the above-mentioned verses: "Agni, who maintains the order of the universe and the inner faculties of the human body, makes the ox (*pingala nadi*, the human masculine-aggressive current) and the cow (*ida nadi*, the feminine passive-emotional current) his tools and bears the soma-delight (attainable in the sahasrara chakra) on his back (to distribute it to the seekers)." As a whole, he maintains, the hymn is speaking to the aspirant about deeply mystical practices. "No doubt the literal translation starts 'Agni whose food is the ox and the barren cow...' but this is not correct according to the context of the hymn."

The *Agamas* do not prescribe animal sacrifice. Sabharathnam asks, "How is it that one set of revelations (*Agamas*) do not speak of animal sacrifice, while another set of revelations (*Vedas*) from the same Lord could? The *Rig Veda* itself states that the *Veda* mantras should be understood against the background of the *Agamas*. The two sets of scriptures complement each other."

Vamadeva adds, "It would be wrong to say that the *Vedas* do not allow any animal sacrifice. However, animal sacrifice was generally regarded as an inferior sacrifice for less-evolved souls, in whom the gunas [qualities] of rajas [agitation] and tamas [lethargy] are still powerful. For those of inner vision, more sattvic [pure] in nature, the animal was symbolic of certain states of mind to be offered to the Deity. So, it is also wrong to say that the *Vedas* had a high regard for animal sacrifice and thought it to be equal to the other types of sacrifice."

Sabharathnam remarks, "I am not saying that sacrifices were not conducted externally. The grains, vegetables, plants, sweets and other such items the *Vedas* enjoin us to sacrifice should be considered representative of the animals. It was never the actual animals that were intended to be sacrificed. It was in this way that the Vedic yajnas were conducted in the earlier periods, before the *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* were written. Certain Vedic pandits took the literal mean-



ing and wrote treatises prescribing the sacrifice of actual animals. Unfortunately, their writings were widely read, and genuine yajnas came to be considered a lesser form of worship."

Vamadeva points out the rarity of references to animal sacrifice in the *Vedas*: "Of substance-based offerings, dairy products like ghee and milk are the most common, and Soma, which usually had a plant basis, is said to be the highest of all offerings. Actual references to animal sacrifices in Vedic texts do exist but are relatively rare. I have found no more than a handful of such potential references in the entire *Rig Veda*, whereas offerings of ghee, honey and Soma can be found in great abundance."

According to Sabharathnam, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* established that the Vedic sacrifices are intended to be spiritual, that they do not involve the killing of animals. "In fact, many *Upanishads* were the result of sages' efforts to expose the spiritual side of the Vedic yajnas, to be performed internally."

Historical Perspective

Phagunadi maintains, "Animal sacrifice is right as per the *Vedas*. It is discussed in the *Mahabharata* as well. Orthodox [ancient] Hinduism is completely different than what Hindus practice in India now."

Swami Harshananda's *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism* offers this opinion: "Sacrificing an animal to please a supernatural Deity is a common feature found in many cultures, including that of Hinduism, during the early part of their development. Though formal animal sacrifices of the early Vedic period gradually lost their importance, due



to the reformatory movements of the Upanishadic sages, Jainism and Buddhism, a new type of animal sacrifice got into the fabric of Hinduism during later ages as aboriginal cultures got integrated into the Hindu fold. The Deity was invariably an aspect of Durga or Kali and the rituals were very simple. Buffalo, goats, sheep and cockerels were the usual sacrificial victims. It was believed that these victims would go to heaven."

Hinduism came to Bali 1,200–1,500 years ago. At that time, the practice of animal sacrifice may have been more prevalent in India than it is now. According to Vamadeva, animal sacrifice occurs today not only in Bali but in the Himalayas, Assam and the northeast of India, as well parts of Orissa and Bengal, Nepal and a few places in Punjab.

Dwi Rupini Andayani, Ida Rsi's daughter, concludes, "I visited India as a small child with my father in 1999 and have taken around twenty tour groups there in recent years. The Indian way of worshiping is mainly different from ours in that they do not have such an elaborate system of offerings, including the rituals of animal sacrifice. In some ways, Bali's Hinduism is closer to that of Nepal than of India."



Sacred or sacrificed? Even cows are sacrificed in Bali on rare occasions, including during the massive Ekadasa Rudra festival.

Bali until now, where beef is offered as part of our big ceremony every hundred years and smaller ceremonies every ten years."

I felt compelled to ask about the sacredness of the cow, an idea that is so strong in India. If cows are sacred, shouldn't they be protected instead of sacrificed? Prof. Phagunadi responded, "We are not as strict about the cow as you are in India. In Bali, the cow is treated as a holy animal, but not as a sacred animal. We consider holy and sacred to be different. Holy means something we respect. Sacred means something we cannot touch."

Phagunadi continued, "Hinduism in Bali is most ancient. Here we practice Tantric Saiva Siddhanta, as opposed to the Vedantic Saiva Siddhanta of India. Most of our temples are tantric, and that is the reason we carry out animal sacrifice." He elaborated on the local

Setting Souls Free with Fire To Reincarnate in Paradise

Balinese Hindus believe proper cremation is critical to cutting earthly bonds and ensuring the soul's unfettered passage into its next birth—back in heavenly Bali

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

FROM THE MOMENT I LANDED IN BALI I kept hearing about Bali's extremely expensive and colorful cremations, known as *ngaben* or *pelebon*. Part of my assignment from HINDUISM TODAY was to personally attend a cremation ceremony. I had two opportunities. My guide, priest Ida Rsi, took me to the cremation of an old, wealthy farmer. We also attended the post-cremation purification ceremonies for a priest's family. In addition, we were given photos of a royal cremation held in August 2011, just a month before I arrived (shown below and on the next page).

Unlike India, where cremation is a private, extremely somber and sorrowful affair, in Bali cremations are spectacular and festive.

Spectacular send-off: (left-to-right: 1) A nine-tiered bade for the remains of the late Anak Agung Niang Rai, wife of late King of Ubud. The bade was 25m tall, weighed ten tons and cost a billion rupiah. 2) The queen's black-bull sarcophagus in procession. 3) The bull is burned after her remains were placed inside; 4,500 people worked to conduct the event.



DARMAYASA



SHUTTERSTOCK

And, to my surprise, tourists and journalists like myself are more than welcome to attend. Here there is no question about life after death, and it is the duty of family and community to spare no cost and effort to set the soul completely free. The passage to *swarga* (heaven) is not a simple journey. Great care must be taken to ensure that a loved one is not caught in state of bondage in the lower astral realms but free to travel on. Anything less would be disrespectful. Further, since he or she is destined for union with God or a new body in heavenly Bali, it is a joyous celebration, the bigger the better!

A Wealthy Farmer Sent to Heaven

I Pekak Wayan, a farmer from Banjar Kaja Setan, had passed and was cremated on Sep-

tember 20, 2011, during my visit. We arrived at the outskirts of his village around 10am. The streets where the procession would pass were barricaded. Villagers waited on all sides to bid their last farewell to the departed soul. Hectic activity was going on at the home of the deceased. A large number of relatives, village friends and neighbors had gathered outside, attired in colorful Balinese dress, unlike in India where you would see only white or black. The overall atmosphere was festive and joyful. Many of the women who were close relatives, all formally dressed, carried beautiful flower offerings on their heads. One told me the deceased was an eighty-year-old farmer. He had a happy, large and prosperous family from his two marriages. They were well off and therefore able to cremate him within a few days of his passing.

With the priest chanting mantras, half a dozen young men took the body out of the home and placed it on a palanquin called *wadah* or *bade*, made of bamboo and colorfully decorated with paper, silk cloth, mir-



JAMAHAL BLOGSPOT

rors and flowers. On the back of the bade, prominently displayed, was a photograph of the deceased. The number of tiers of the bade depend on the caste and background of the deceased—seven for *kshatriyas*, nine for royalty and eleven for high-caste *brahmin* priests. Since this old man was a farmer, he had only one tier. Men pulled the tower on a cart. Women pulled out a white sheet to cover those who marched ahead of the *wadah*. A gamelan band played, while the priest kept sprinkling holy water all on around the dead body. On the beat of the music the body of the deceased was vigorously shaken by those carrying the bade, to ward off the influence of unholy spirits.

We covered several kilometers in the scorching heat. After forty minutes we arrived at the cremation grounds, where I was surprised to find booths selling cold drinks and snacks to the participants. This certainly would be forbidden in India. Even here, at the cremation grounds, the atmosphere was festive; the people chatted happily with each other as the priest prepared the body.

All the floral offerings and gifts were placed on a large platform. Finally the body was placed on a platform and cremated to the sound of priests' chanting and traditional Balinese gamelan music, played by over a dozen musicians in a nearby covered area.

In India, no petroleum product is normally used to burn the body. But here, they make liberal use of pressurized kerosene to ensure that the fire lights easily and completely consumes the body.

Mass cremation: (above) Several royalty (in black-bull sarcophagi) and a priest (in white bull) and others are cremated on the same grounds. (below) Gamelan musicians play traditional music at the cremation grounds during the funeral of a wealthy farmer.



LUDMILA MASLOVSKAYA

Why Mourn for Those Going to God?

Prof. Dr. Litt I Gusti Putu Phagunadi explained the Balinese Hindu attitude toward death. "Even today we are following Brahmanism. The basics have not changed here. Our *Vedas* tell us there is no need to be sad. Muslims and Christians are sorrowful at death—but not Hindus. We are going to heaven to meet God. We have to be cheerful. That is why music is played. We live in bondage on Earth and perform our karma. We believe in *punarjanma*, reincarnation,

karma and moksha. We have come here from heaven and go back to heaven. If a young one dies, we are sad for some time; that is natural. But finally we have to be happy, as the soul has been released. According to orthodox Hinduism there should be no mourning. In fact, if your mother dies and you are weeping, she will not be able to go to heaven. We believe Ganga Ji is going to merge in the sea. That is why after cremation the ashes are immersed in the sea. Nobody is allowed to keep the ashes at home."



A Precise and Complex Undertaking

Dr. I Gusti Ngurah Sudiana, a professor of sociology, explained, "In India cremation is done as soon as possible, but in Bali we wait for an auspicious day. The cremation may not occur for seven days or even three to six months. We have two types of cremations: those done for a single individual and mass cremations. Wealthy families embalm and keep the body at home. Commoners bury the body at a cemetery and wait for the auspicious day. Then such bodies are dug up and as 100 bodies or more are cremated at one time."

On the chosen day, funeral rites begin at home with a complex series of ceremonies. The Balinese consider any remains that were buried as impure, so the exhumed remains—by now nothing but a pile of bones—are left at the cemetery, not brought to the home. Ida Rsi Bhujangga Waisnawa Putra Sara Shri Satya Jyoti describes the general flow of events: "At home where the body is kept, or using an effigy if the body was buried, the priest prepares holy water, known as tirtham. This water becomes like the holy water of river Ganga."

"The body or effigy is taken on a special palanquin in a grand procession to the cremation grounds. For priests or wealthy people, the remains are transferred to a sarcophagus fashioned in the form of a bull or other animal, depending on the caste of the deceased. The holy water is sprinkled or poured on the physical remains of the deceased, which is then cremated. The ashes and powdered

bones are thereafter placed inside a yellow coconut with more priestly rites. This is treated as a living person and taken to the sea or a river for immersion. This stage, the initial cremation, sends the *pancha maha bhutas* (five elements) of the deceased back to their origin. The soul is now free of bodily form and is called a *pitra*."

But this is not the end. Later, more ceremonies must be done—as elaborate as the family's finances will allow. After a week, a month or even some years, a purification ritual, called *nyekah* or *memukur*, must be performed. I was able to take part in the *nyekah* of a priest family.

Ida Rsi says, "Nyekah serves to purify the soul by releasing it from all desire or need. Since the bones have already been thrown into the sea during the initial cremation, *nyekah* is done with an effigy of the deceased, a *lingga sangge* (symbol of the soul). The rites start early in the morning and go all day. On the evening of the purification ceremonies there is usually entertainment in the form of music, masked dances and a puppet show that entertains and instructs everyone with the *Mahabharata* story of Bhima's passage to heaven. Early the next morning, a final puja is performed, the effigy is burned and its ashes are immersed in the sea. The soul, now purified, is considered to have been transformed into Deity and has joined the Gods as an *hygang pitara*, a departed ancestor."

Later in the afternoon, the next day or next week, on an auspicious time chosen by the



Helping an old friend on his way to heaven: The bade for this man is only one tier tall, as befits his caste status as a farmer. But being affluent, his family is able to give him a grand send-off all on his own. No tears here. Everyone rejoices in his transition.

high priest, the *ngulapan* ceremony is performed. For this the family goes the sea and calls back the soul. Then they go to a temple, carrying a photo or effigy of the person. After various rites, they take the soul back to the home shrine to be worshiped along with other ancestors. Still, it is assumed that the deceased will eventually be reborn on Earth. Priests carefully note the times of death and watch the timing of new births to see if they can identify the reappearance of someone who has died.

Financial Challenges

Centuries ago, cremations were simpler. Over time rituals have grown more and more elaborate. I learned that wealthy families may, without strain, spend enormous sums on cremations, and this benefits the community. But common villagers have a more difficult time and may even go into debt to meet the costs. The relatively new mass-cremation procedure allows everyone to participate without excessive cost.

Currently, there is also a move toward simplification. Ida Rsi says, "I have tried to introduce simpler cremation procedures and have published a book about this. I believe in time people will adopt it."

But I did not find many criticizing the performance of this or other rituals. Most seemed committed to maintaining their traditions as they are. Dr. Wedakarna Arya, a prominent Hindu leader, notes that Balinese Hindus do need to find new means of prosperity to continue performing their cremations with the traditional pomp and show. He hopes that, through education, Hindu youth will increase their earnings and use their wealth to preserve and continue their rich and elaborate culture.

MEMORY

Dealing with the Unspeakable

Shaken by an attack of fiendish terror, the Balinese respond with forgiveness

Not long after 9/11 in the US, Bali was also shaken by terrorism. In the tourist district of Kuta, a suicide bomber detonated a bomb inside a nightclub. Patrons fled into the street, where many were killed by a second and much more powerful explosion when a car bomb, hidden inside a white van, was detonated 20 seconds after the first. Damage to the densely populated residential and commercial district was immense. The car bomb left a crater one meter deep. Over 200 people died. In a state of shock, the Balinese reacted in the only way they knew.

BY JANET DE NEEFE

ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2002, THE gentle touch of my daughter Dewi shook me out of my early morning dreams. She whispered about "a bomb in Kuta." I can still hear her words clearly in my head and recall the expression of nervous concern on her face. Together we watched the television with disbelief.

Many Balinese friends gathered at our house that morning. My Balinese husband's eyes were moist as he discussed plans to help the victims. "Your daddy's very upset," I told Dewi. "Yes, I know, Mummy," she said. "I think he's going to cry." For my husband, Ketut, one of the greatest sadnesses was that tourists had died on Balinese soil, that the Balinese people had not been able to protect them. He reminded his friends that they have a great responsibility to keep visitors and guests safe from harm.

We gathered with a large group of expatriate friends, set up an extra phone line and began contacting nearby hotels and restaurants for donations of food. In the kitchen, we began to make hundreds of sandwiches and rice meals and collected drinks and other necessities for victims and helpers. The first team of volunteers headed off to Sanglah Hospital in Denpasar. Ketut and his friends helped organize a blood donors' unit at a nearby clinic and translated for the terrified tourists when necessary.

Volunteers from all walks of life spent day after day at Sanglah Hospital, counseling parients who had lost their children, answering desperate phone calls inquiring after missing persons, attending to the injured and organizing bodies in the morgue. Their only skills for dealing with the crisis were a com-



passionate heart and a determination to help as many sufferers as possible. One volunteer sat with a badly burnt Indonesian woman who did not speak English, and the volunteer could not speak Indonesian. She held the woman's hand and sang simple, gentle songs that lulled her to sleep. When the Indonesian woman woke, she asked the staff to find the tourist who had sat by her bed and sung so sweetly.

After the bombing, the Balinese made offerings to apologize to God. Assuming they must have erred somehow, they were now asking for forgiveness. They searched for possible reasons why the bombing had happened, and repented for their perceived misdeeds. The tragedy spoke to them also regarding the balance between man and his environment. Was this a message that there has been too much development on this picturesque island? Perhaps it was karma from past deeds, or a sentence from a previous life. Some said it was the backlash for slaying an ancient turtle at a ritual a few months before, when the priest, in a trance, predicted doom to Bali. "Do you think we are being punished?" a driver asked a Western friend of mine. She was astonished that the Balinese people could internalize such a tragedy as part of their karma.

Mystical stories began to spread soon after

the tragedy. On the Friday after the bombing, sprays of fragrant raindrops fell to the ground, like tears, from the leaves of a huge shady tree within the inner courtyard of the Ubud Palace. Word spread throughout the town, and by 10 pm the small area was crowded with Balinese throwing their arms up to receive blessings. The atmosphere within this royal sanctuary was charged with happiness and hope. "Could this be a miracle?" I heard a Westerner ask. The following day the shower persisted. By midday the priests had arrived and began chanting sacred mantras to the anxious crowd. More Balinese arrived to gather water and take it home to their shrines. People lined up for blessings. The holy men who channel spirits were called upon to ask for an explanation; the message was that Balinese ancestors of the palace were responsible for the water. The collective team of deified spirits were showering the people of Ubud with holy water to protect them from further troubles and to purify the village. The impact of this single event gave all of us great hope that peace would prevail. The prince gave a speech at the temple, his heartfelt emotions obvious in the tears on his cheeks and his delicate words. He asked for God's forgiveness. There was no talk of blame.

Ubud quickly became an empty town, tourists nowhere to be seen. Unemployment

soared throughout the country. I remember lying in bed, tears falling on my pillow, as I thought of all the plans I had made for the coming months, plans I now had to abandon. And I was only one amongst thousands.

My children asked endless questions about why the bombing had happened and who had created such evil. At night their dreams were filled with ghosts and disturbed souls flying through the villages, for a soul that is not properly cremated can wreak havoc. People said the security guards at ground zero in Kuta heard screaming voices in the dark silent hours after midnight. Weeks later, when I intended to drive past the bombing site with the children, Dewi was almost hysterical in her refusal. "We can't drive past today. It's a dark moon and we haven't brought any offerings," she cried.

We were present at the cleansing ceremony on November 15, 33 days after the attack. Driving through cinematographically beautiful areas, which reminded me how special that part of the island is, we eventually entered a covered area over which white cloth was suspended: "the road to God." We knew the site was near. From here, we could see shrines and temple paraphernalia sparkling in the sun, surrounded by Balinese umbrellas and crowds of people. Then the devastation of the bombsite unfolded before us. Many

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Purification and peace: (left) The cleansing ceremony attracted thousands; (below) priests perform purifying rituals using ancient texts to bless the site, while dancers stand by and observe

of the buildings surrounding the explosions had been destroyed. Under a pavilion sat twelve high priests, chanting and ringing small brass bells. The gamelan played soft music outside and special performances were held. Young girls attired in yellow and white danced the *rejeng*, a traditional temple dance; a mask dance followed. Some sensitive tourists wore a full Balinese ceremonial outfit. Journalists were baffled—some even angry—that they were not granted special privileges at the event, but this was not for them.

Cleansing rites are common in Bali. Known as Pacaruan or Mecaru, their purpose is to balance all aspects of the universe to maintain peace and harmony on the planet. The October tragedy was of such magnitude that the sacred texts were consulted. The basic principles of life had been violated and only ritual and prayer could restore them. When the priests had finished chanting, certain areas were blessed, and then we were called to pray. There must have been at least three thousand people there, an ocean of people as far as the eye could see. The prayers started with the Gayatri Mantra. I held my hands to my heart and lowered my head in preparation. The whole area was charged with an extraordinary power as thousands of people joined in this mystical chant. My hands began to shake with the intensity of the prayer. The smell of sandalwood and jasmine incense sat on the moist air. Following the priest's instructions, we prayed to bless the departed souls on their journey to eternity, for forgiveness of our careless deeds that created such tragedy, for the recovery of the wounded victims, for the tormented survivors of the

disaster, and for the blinded criminals so that they might repent and see the evil of their ways. We also prayed for restored balance between the macrocosm and microcosm, man and the universe. Finally, we prayed for Bali, the island of the Gods, this tiny land that has touched the heart of so many: "May this gentle paradise recover from sadness and return once more to a life of peace and harmony."

My companions and I slowly walked back to the hotel in the scorching midday sun. Later that afternoon, as we sat at a roadside cafe near Kuta Square, a beautiful procession passed by. It included Balinese girls in shimmering gold and white, a Muslim dance ensemble, a Chinese dragon, a Balinese Barong figurine, gamelan players, baris dancers, Christians and many more. It was a message of peace and unity. Would it be any other way? Here in Bali, we continue to live harmoniously together, and that cannot be changed.

Many tragedies have been experienced here, but Bali has risen from the ashes every time. This terrible event created a positive time of deep introspection and spirituality, a time to examine the seen and unseen elements of mystical life. It has reminded the Balinese who they are. And at the end of the day, the allegiance to family and friends is the light that illuminates their lives. Takwa Masi is the Hindu belief of brotherhood, which states that all people of the universe belong to each other and together share the triumphs and tragedies of the world. The Balinese are optimistic: their prayers may take many full moons to be answered, but we all know that good things come to those who wait, and pray. ☪



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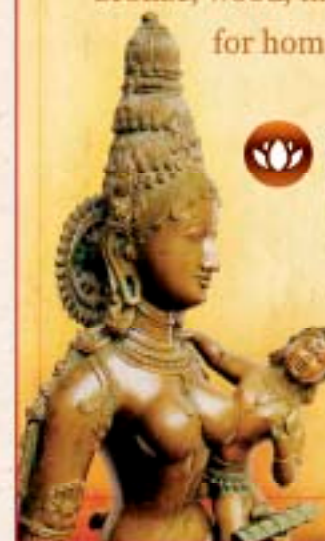


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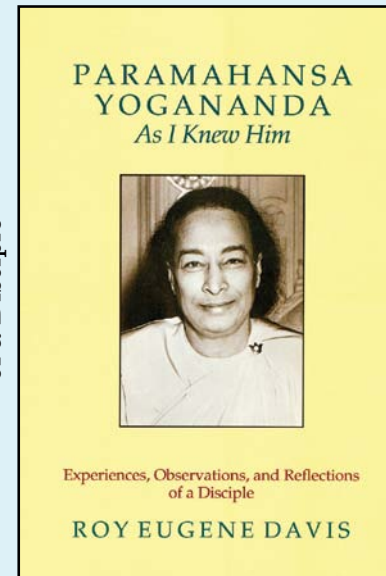
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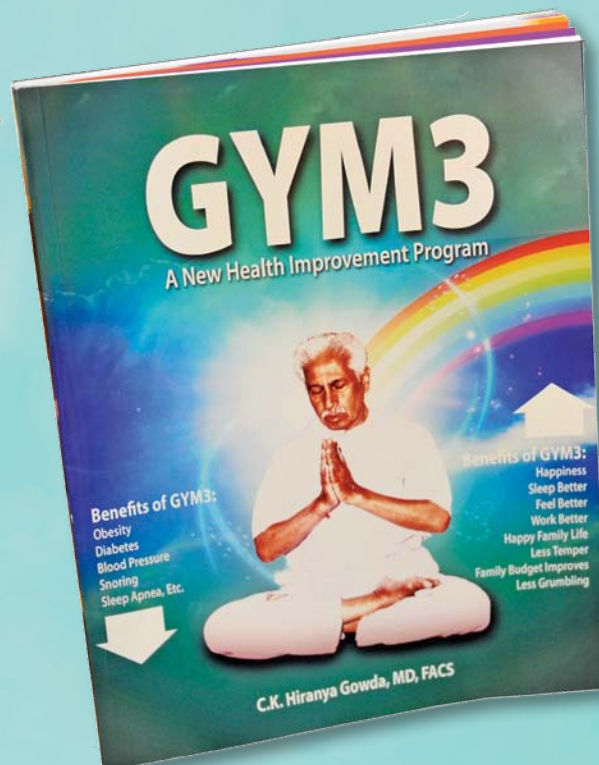


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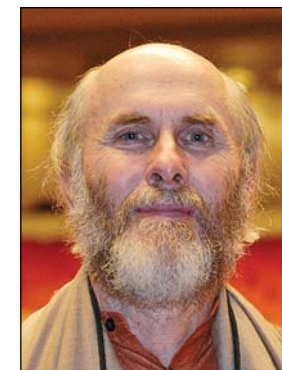
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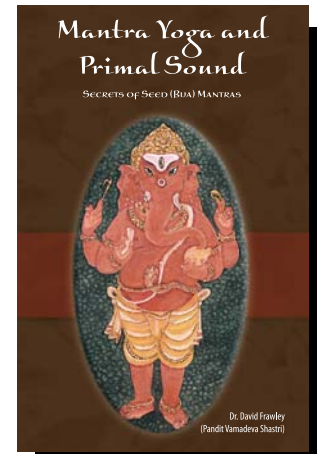
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Mantra Yoga and Primal Sound

Dr. David Frawley

Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri) is a world renowned teacher of Yoga, Ayurveda, Vedic astrology and Veda and the author of several definitive texts in these fields over the past twenty-five years. His book on Mantra Yoga provides keys to the meaning and application of these powerful sacred sounds that is not easily available in print today.



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- | | |
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| Jul 15-21 Children's Retreat I
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(Fri-Mon) B. Gita, Ch. 15, v. 15
Kaupeena Panchakam |
| Jul 22-28 Family Vedanta Retreat I
(Sun-Sat) Vivekachudamani (from v. 82) | Sep 15-22 One-Week Vedanta Course
(Sat-Sat) Kathopanishad • Pancadasi |
| Jul 22-28 Children's Retreat II
(Sun-Sat) Ages 9-16, without parents | Sep 23-Oct 6 Two-Week Vedanta Course
(Sun-Sat) Upadesa Sahasri,
Narada Bhakti Sutra |
| Jul 29-Aug 4 Family Vedanta Retreat II
(Sun-Sat) Aitareya Upanishad 1.1
B. Gita, Ch. IV, from v. 21 | Oct 10-Nov 17 Fall Vedanta Six-Week Course
(Wed-Sat) Taittiriya Upanishad
B. Gita Ch. IX |
| Aug 5-12 Family Vedanta Retreat III
(Sun-Sun) Kathopanishad I.3 (10-12)
B. Gita, Ch. IV (cont. from Aug. 4) | Nov 22-25 Thanksgiving Family Retreat
(Thu-Sun) Swami Tattvavidananda |
| Aug 12 Pujya Swamiji's Birthday
(Sun) at the Gurukulam | Dec 24-31 Year End Vedanta Retreat
(Mon-Mon) (Christmas) Pujya Swamiji
Swami Tattvavidananda |
| Aug 12-17 Carnatic Music Workshop & Purna Vidya Teachers' Training
(Sun-Fri) Pujya Swami ji • Ramachandran | Jan 1, 2013 New Year's Day Celebration
(Tue) |
| Aug 23-26 Patrons' Retreat 1 • B. Gita, Ch. IV,
(Thu-Sun) v. 7-8 • Kaupeena Panchakam | |

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Holi Thursday, March 8th, 8pm

Hanuman Jayanti Friday, April 6th, 8pm

Nrisimha Jayanti Saturday, May 5th, 8pm

Pranayama Workshop

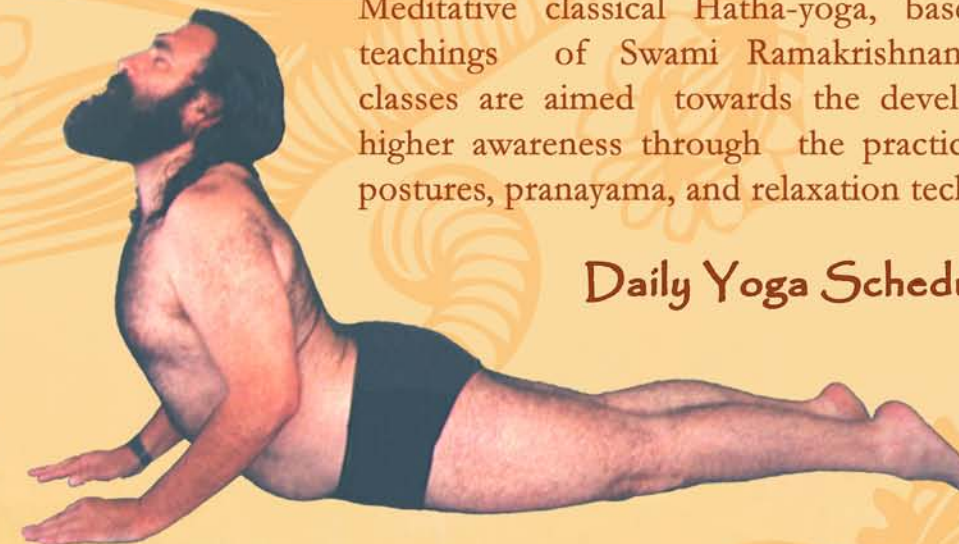
Saturday, March 3rd, 1pm - 5pm

(Registration required)



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Daily Yoga Schedule

9am - 11:30 am
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6pm - 7:30pm
8pm - 9:30 pm

* Thurs. -no 8pm class

Philosophy Classes - Wednesdays 8pm

Special program - Thursdays 8pm

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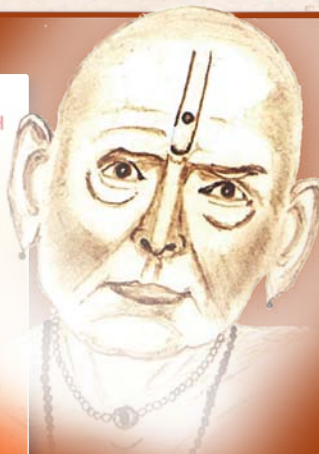
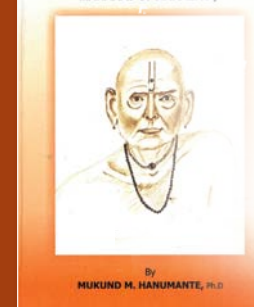
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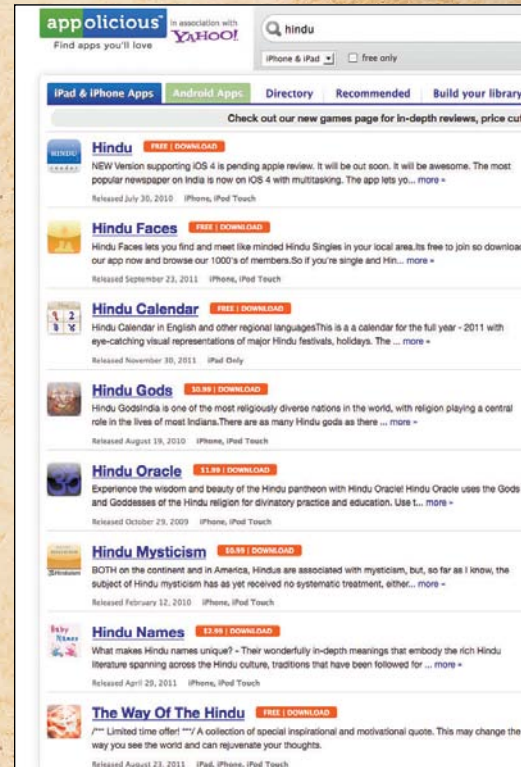
Hindu Mobile Content Lags, But a Few Good Resources Are Emerging

IN THE YEAR 2000, NO ONE WOULD HAVE believed that in ten years most of us would be getting our daily dose of digital content on small devices that fit in a pocket or purse. Visiting big websites on your PC screen was obviously better than on the tiny window of your Blackberry. But Apple changed the game with a high resolution screen that uses the entire surface of the device—like a mini-TV in your hands. And with today's apps, we can choose and interact with discrete content, without traversing the noise and distraction of big sites with wall-to-wall links and ads. Mobile is a global shift driven by a whole generation raised on video games. Today, if you tell young folks they can get HINDUISM TODAY on the web, they just roll their eyes and ask, "Okay, but do you have it as an app?" (Our answer: We will soon.)

Since the mobile revolution began, millions of apps have been released. Hindu

content in this arena is still lean. A search on "Hindu" or "Hinduism" (you need to do separate searches) at Applicious.com turns up only 60 apps for iOS and 40 for Android. Along with some very lightweight and questionable apps—such as Hindu Oracle, which "uses the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu religion for divinatory practice and education," and Hindu Faces, a dating service—we see useful apps, such as Hindu Names for babies and Kids Hindu Puzzles, that will put positive images into the mind of your children. Most of the interesting content for adults are just eBooks repackaged as apps. For just \$3.99 read J. Agarwal's *I Am Proud To Be A Hindu*. The Sterling Book Of Hinduism has an authentic view of Hinduism by renowned political leader and writer, Dr. Karan Singh. You want simple and free? iDivine Hindu offers the daily darshan of your favorite Deity. The list is short, but still worth your time. Check it out.

www.hinduismtoday.com



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Hindu India Through Colonial Eyes

THE BRITISH LIBRARY (BL.UK) IN LONDON is among the world's ten largest libraries. Of particular interest to Hindus interested in Indian history are writings from the time of the British Raj. Remote access to the library is a formidable challenge. A Readers Pass requires a researcher's application. But recently BL.UK released a marvelous app, the British Library 19th Century Historical Collection for the iPad. Look for it in iTunes. Get the paid subscription (only \$2.99) to access the full content. The app is superbly designed. Books are shown in their original scanned form. It's almost like holding an old manuscript. A search for "Hindu" gets you a short list. If you thirst for a glimpse of India the way it was 200 years ago, many of these books hold

marvelous vignettes of those times. *Kasi, or Benares, the Holy City of the Hindus*, alone is worth the whole app.

Be forewarned. Most authors of these books on Hindus or India were missionaries or British administrators. While sharing intimate views, they do so with the inimitable British Christian arrogance of those times. The fashion of most was to deliver his prose with as much denigration for all things Asian as his pen could muster. As a reader, you will need a strong stomach to tolerate the vitriol while enjoying the background pictures of our holy land. But this experience is educational in itself. If you thought that complaints of British racism in those days are exaggerated or paranoid, you won't after you read from these books.

